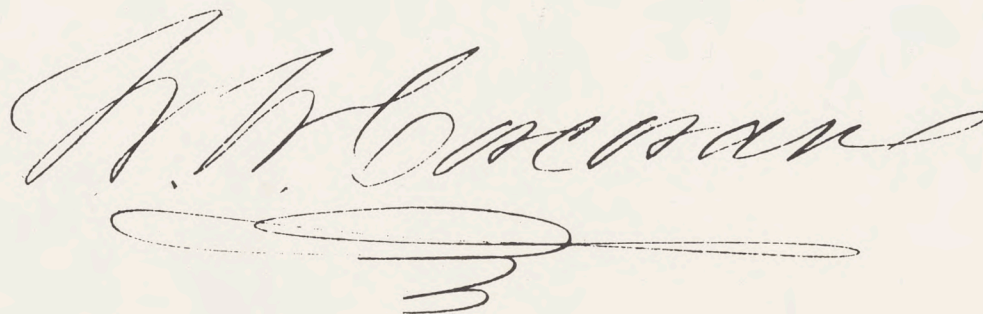


CORCORAN





William Wilson Corcoran, Washington's most distinguished and best-loved citizen, has closed a long life that was full of good works. He was so much to Washington, and Washington so much to him, that the man and the city seemed indissolubly associated; and in one sense—the best sense—that seeming was a reality. No other name except that which the Capital bears, no other memory except that of the Father of our Republic, are so dear to the hearts of the people of this city.



"Corcoran" is published as a tribute to the founder,

William Wilson Corcoran.

Rembrandt Peale Washington before Yorktown,
1824-25 oil on canvas 44.1

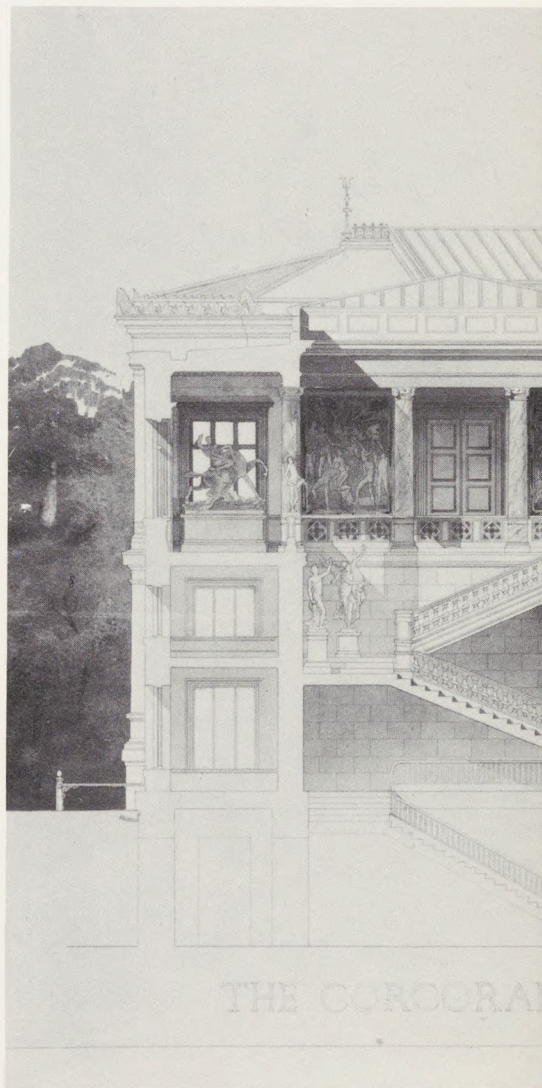
*Accession numbers are given for all works in the
collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. In certain
cases donors are identified.*



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*Architect's first proposal for present Corcoran Gallery of
Art. This proposal was not accepted but in it can be
seen the basic interior structure of the building as
constructed.*





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The American Genius

January 24 through April 4, 1976

An exhibition celebrating the founder W. W. Corcoran, his collection, the school, Washington art, recent acquisitions and the re-installation of the American Collection. The exhibition is made possible through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Washington Room

A changing presentation of contemporary Washington art, made possible through a grant from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Introduction

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, founded in 1869 by William Wilson Corcoran, was the first art gallery in the nation's capital and one of the oldest in the country. At the time of the nation's Bicentennial, the Corcoran pays tribute to its founder who enriched the heritage of the country through his unique patronage and encouragement of American art. The Corcoran honors the founder with publications and exhibitions based on his life, the history of the gallery and school, and the American Collection.

Over one hundred years ago, William Wilson Corcoran was one of the few patrons of American art. While most collectors acquired European art, Corcoran encouraged the preservation of American art through his patronage. His intention was "to elevate public taste through the contemplation of art and to educate through the school." The Corcoran School of Art, established in 1890, is one of the oldest schools of art in the country.

William Wilson Corcoran, best remembered for his gallery, was a generous philanthropist and a patriotic citizen, whose endeavors positively affected the community and country. The following essay, based on intensive research by Davira Spiro Taragin, gives an account of his life and the early days of his gallery. The publication should not be regarded as a definitive history but should arouse the curiosity of others, so that further research will take place on the founder and the gallery.

The life of the founder is full of interest: his early days in Georgetown, his elopement, banking success, the founding of the gallery and his many civic activities. From paintings and photographs, he appears to have been a handsome man; even in old age, with white hair and moustache, he had an upright stance and striking appearance. His love of women is well-known, with numerous beauties visiting the gallery in his company. In his time, Corcoran knew that the gallery would need Federal financial assistance, but to this day, no regular funds have been forthcoming. Nevertheless, his early understanding and support of American art enriched the nation, which today increasingly realizes the importance and need for art and culture.

Today the Corcoran looks to the future with a realization of its unique role in the community and its need for increased Federal and private support. Founded by a man with foresight and vision, the gallery maintains a proud tradition of commitment to American art. With the emergence of Washington as a cultural capital, the role of the Corcoran Gallery of Art becomes increasingly important. The Corcoran's collection is a comprehensive collection of painting and sculpture of the United States of America, particularly of the 18th and 19th centuries. This collection, supplemented by special exhibitions of contemporary American art and the avant-garde, offers a rare insight into the emergence and development of art in America. The Corcoran Gallery of Art, in conjunction with the other museums and galleries of the city,

affords an opportunity for comprehensive research and scholarship in American art.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art and School of Art give particular support to Washington art and artists. The School, the only professional studio school in the nation's capital, makes the Corcoran unique, as does the American Collection and the exhibitions, especially those of contemporary art and art of the Washington area. Acquisitions strengthen the collections and the Women's Committee and the Friends of the Corcoran have been most generous, as have other individuals, all of whom contribute to the progress and reputation of the institution.

The Corcoran depends on individual contributions and private patronage. The tribute to the founder also acknowledges those who have given generously and unselfishly to the Gallery and School, and who must continue such support to ensure the survival and progress of the Corcoran, in its support and encouragement of the "American Genius".

Roy Slade
January, 1976



William Wilson Corcoran

1798-1888

Mr. Corcoran was of medium height, straight, corpulent, though not grossly so, and endowed by nature with a strong constitution. He had a noble physique, his fine large head was crowned with white hair, his complexion was clear, and his eyes black and piercing. He was scrupulously neat in his person, carried a gold-headed cane, and wore gloves in the street, but was entirely devoid of affectation or vanity. In his intercourse with friends, dignity and affability were happily blended. He always retained an old-fashioned courtesy of manner, known as the manner of the old school. To the gentler sex he was especially deferential. No one was more delighted with the society of intelligent and agreeable women than Mr. Corcoran. He retained to a remarkable degree his recollection of the past. Endowed with a great fund of humor, he was not surpassed as a raconteur.

A newspaper account dated February 25, 1888, Washington D.C., presumably the Evening Star.

Joseph Pennell Portrait of W. W. Corcoran ink drawing x166



As a private individual, inspired by an appreciation of my relations to my fellow-man, I have, from early youth to old age, endeavored to be just to all, and generous to the deserving. Blessed by kind Providence with larger possessions than commonly fall to the lot of man, I have regarded them as a sacred trust for the benefit of knowledge, truth, and charity. My reward has been an approving conscience, and the gratifying appreciation of many good and great men. . . .

The most valuable bequest I can make you is a good name, and I feel assured you will cherish it, for its price is above rubies.

W. W. Corcoran
July 1, 1878

*Letter to his grandchildren
excerpt from "A Grandfather's Legacy".*

*Mr. William Wilson Corcoran reading in the library of his home at the corner of 17th and H Streets, N.W.
Photograph by Rice, 19th century Washington photographer.*

William Wilson Corcoran is best known in the nation's capital and in the art world for the gallery which bears his name. The Corcoran Gallery of Art was one of the first in the United States. Corcoran contributed his art collection, ample financial resources, and an intense personal commitment to the gallery and the development of its collection. As a generous philanthropist he is well remembered in Washington, D.C. for establishment of the Louise Home, to provide lodging for elderly impoverished women; his gift of Oak Hill Cemetery to Georgetown; and for the financial support he gave numerous orphanages, churches and other charitable institutions.

Corcoran must be recognized for the unique position he held as a collector and patron of the arts during the second half of the nineteenth century. At a time when American patrons were purchasing German and French art, Corcoran was one of the few collectors who extensively supported living American artists. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the promotion of American art was his wish for a national portrait gallery in the nation's capital to house portraits of the country's heroes.

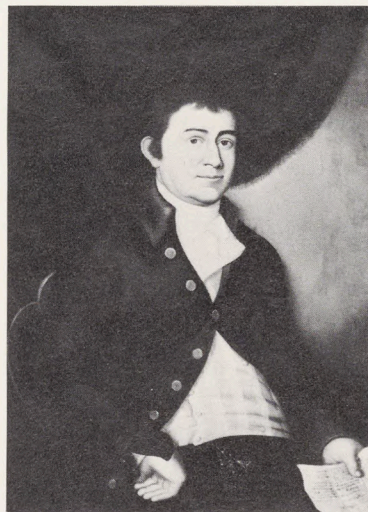
Although he played an extremely active role in bringing art to culture-starved, mid-nineteenth century Washington, Corcoran was not initially a connoisseur of art. He was a skilled businessman who patronized art with close attention to the expenses incurred. His philanthropic gifts for promotion of the arts were motivated by a desire to educate and provide for the

"illumination of the unlettered masses."¹ Not until he was fifty years old and had established his financial and social position in the nation's capital did he become actively involved in the acquisition of works of art.

William Wilson Corcoran was born in Georgetown, D.C. in 1798 to relatively well-to-do parents. His father, Thomas Corcoran, had been a poor man when he emigrated from Ireland in 1783. By the time his fifth child, William Wilson, was born, he had built a highly successful leather and tanning business in Georgetown. Subsequently, he was elected mayor of the city several times. William Wilson was educated in small local private schools. At an early age he was interested in the acquisition of wealth. After one year at Georgetown College, he dropped out of school, against his father's wishes, to work in his brothers' dry goods firm. He became a close friend of George Peabody, a partner of Elisha Riggs' in a nearby dry goods store. Peabody later became a great financier, philanthropist and founder of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. At the age of nineteen Corcoran was able to form his own dry goods firm with the assistance of his brothers. In the first few years the business was so successful that he expanded his dealings to include auctions and commissions. The Panic of 1823 ended this brief period of prosperity and W. W. Corcoran & Co. failed, leaving its owner with debts which, although legally settled within two years, were not repaid to his personal satisfaction until much later.

Charles Peale Polk Thomas Corcoran oil on canvas
47.14

Charles Peale Polk Mrs. Thomas Corcoran oil on
canvas 47.15



Active with the volunteers, in 1824 W. W. Corcoran was appointed a first lieutenant by President Monroe, and in 1825 he was promoted to a captaincy by President Adams. In 1830 he was appointed a lieutenant colonel, and later colonel, by President Jackson. In 1849 he was offered command of the militia of the District of Columbia by President Polk, which he declined.

His financial status during the period 1825 to 1836 did not improve, as reflected by the circumstances surrounding his marriage to Louise Amory Morris. W. W. Corcoran enjoyed the company of beautiful women throughout his life. Older families in Georgetown resented his flirting with their eligible daughters because of his financial instability and immigrant background. Nevertheless, young Corcoran had a number of lady followers, all of whom unsuccessfully tried to induce him to marry them. In 1833, at the age of thirty-five, he met the thirteen year old daughter of Commodore Charles Morris. Morris, a distinguished officer of the U.S. Navy, viewed the suitor as a young upstart, interested in marrying his daughter only because of her wealth and social prominence. Since the Commodore and his wife would not condone the marriage, Corcoran and Louise Morris decided to elope. On the night of December 23, 1835, Louise was preparing to descend a ladder from her bedroom window to her beloved and his sister waiting below, when Commodore Morris relented. A minister was called and the couple married. At first the Morrisses were unable to completely accept their new son-in-law. Not until 1837 was a reconciliation

Miss Louise Corcoran, *daughter of William Wilson and Louise Morris Corcoran*, by Louis Matthieu D. Guillaume. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Louise Home, Washington, D.C.

Mrs. Louise Morris Corcoran, by Louis Matthieu D. Guillaume. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Louise Home, Washington, D.C.



achieved following the birth of a daughter, Louise. Family relations were further strengthened by Corcoran's improved financial situation. In 1837 he established a brokerage house in Washington, D.C. and moved his family from Georgetown to Washington. Within two years business had increased to such an extent that he was forced to move his firm to larger quarters. In 1840 Corcoran went into partnership with George Riggs and formed the successful banking firm, Corcoran & Riggs. Success in business came at a time of personal sadness, for his young wife died of consumption that same year.

By the end of the decade, Corcoran's fortune was made. In 1845 Corcoran & Riggs purchased the old United States Bank at the corner of 15th Street and New York Avenue. As financial agent to the Federal Government, the firm was actively involved, from 1846 until 1850, in the sale of U.S. Bonds which

Daniel Huntington Mercy's Dream, 1850 oil on canvas 69.67

Thomas Cole The Departure, 1837 oil on canvas 69.2



were floated by the Government to defray the costs of the Mexican War. When American markets for these securities declined in 1848, Corcoran took the bonds to London and Paris and placed them on European exchanges. The profits from these endeavors were so large that not only was Corcoran able to pay the remainder of the debts incurred by the failure of W. W. Corcoran & Co., but he could have easily retired and lived extravagantly on the accumulated earnings. He remained active in the firm and in Government finance until 1854, after which he retired and devoted himself to philanthropic causes. Orphanages, churches, schools, and individuals benefited from Corcoran's generosity. Throughout his life he maintained the desire to help worthwhile educational and charitable causes and remained until his death a noted American philanthropist.

Concurrent with Corcoran's increasing assistance to humanitarian causes in Washington was his interest in forming an art collection in his home and in promoting art programs in the city.

Corcoran's initial acquisitions of works of art and his first efforts to participate in major architectural projects to improve the city of Washington coincided with his improved financial and social status. Since Corcoran did not know much about art when he began purchasing, many of the works first acquired did not represent his own taste. During a European vacation in 1849,² he carried with him letters of introduction to leaders of European banking houses and to American diplomats. Presentation of these letters led to many new personal and business alliances, and enabled Corcoran to have a thorough tour

Thomas Cole *The Return*, 1837 oil on canvas 69.3

Interior of Chapel at Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, designed by James Renwick, 1850.



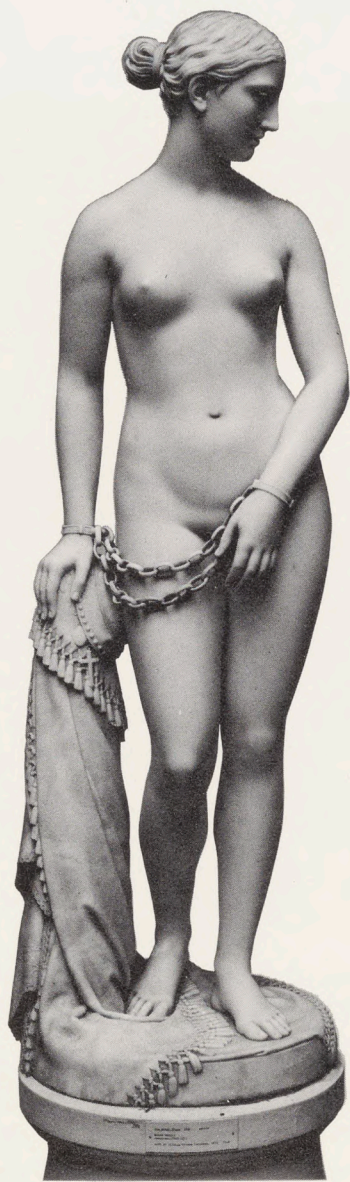
of the continent. His purchases of art were highly influenced by his hosts. With their assistance and encouragement he acquired European landscapes and portraits.

Friends and associates played a less significant role in acquisition of American paintings and sculpture. At the time Corcoran was becoming acquainted with the work of European masters, he already was purchasing American works of art. The year of his first American acquisition is uncertain, but that Corcoran was an active patron of American artists by the summer of 1850 is evident from his correspondence with Daniel Huntington regarding the sale of *Mercy's Dream* and *Christiana and Her Children*. By the following spring his collection was reported to contain landscapes by



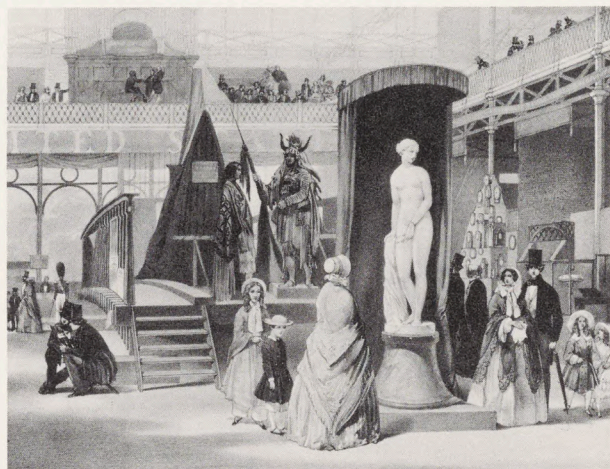
John Frederick Kensett, William Oddie, Charles Lanman, William Brenton Boggs, Thomas Doughty, and Regis François Gignoux. Corcoran wanted to own "the most conspicuous examples" of American art and was willing to pay large sums for highly acclaimed works: prime examples being Thomas Cole's *The Departure* and *The Return*, for which he paid \$6,000.

Corcoran considered his prize acquisition to be Hiram Powers' *The Greek Slave*, for which he paid \$5,000. The original sculpture had won instant acclaim at the Great Exposition of 1851 in London's Crystal Palace. Corcoran acquired the first of five replicas executed by Powers, but was concerned over the value of his acquisition. Reassured by friends and experts,



Hiram Powers The Greek Slave, 1846 marble 73.4

J. Absalom, published by Day & Son America, 1851
color lithograph 55.32



he never again expressed doubts and *The Greek Slave* became evidence of his great appreciation and love of art. Placed on view in his house for the first time in December, 1851, the nude figure shocked many of the guests at his annual Christmas party. This dismay was soon overcome when all the party-goers agreed with one gentleman's comment that Mr. Corcoran was a righteous man and a true critic of art, who would never purchase a work of art that was of inferior quality or in poor taste.

Corcoran obtained many paintings as a result of his desire to be a patron and benefactor of artists. When told of a struggling artist, he often responded by presenting the artist with a commission. In many cases this resulted in acquisitions for very low prices. George Douglass Brewerton's *Crossing the Rocky Mountains* cost only seventy dollars.

Sponsorship of the education of several artists also led to an increase in the number of works in his collection. During the later years of his life the benefactor enjoyed boasting to friends of the role he played in furthering artists' careers.

Among Corcoran's many interests was the development of the Smithsonian Institution. In 1846 Corcoran & Riggs was designated the principal financial agent of the Institution. That year was significant also because Corcoran gave his first major commission to the renowned architect, James Renwick. Whether Corcoran played a role in the selection of Renwick to design the Smithsonian is not known. Nevertheless, the collector was so impressed by the architect that he commissioned Renwick to design the Corcoran Office Building. Later commissions included remodeling his home on Lafayette Square and other properties; and designing the chapel at Oak Hill Cemetery and the Gallery of Art on Pennsylvania Avenue.

After the founding of the Smithsonian, Corcoran became a close friend of its first Secretary, Joseph Henry. Through management of the Smithsonian's finances Corcoran became involved in the landscaping of the Mall. He had employed Andrew Jackson

Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, laid out by George de la Roche. Howard Payne Monument visible in the foreground.



Downing of New York, known for his picturesque naturalism, to landscape his property. After much debate and discussion, Corcoran persuaded President Millard Fillmore to allow Downing to landscape the entire Mall area. Corcoran was unsuccessful in reviving interest in Downing's program after the latter's tragic death, but did help ensure that the widow receive payment for her husband's work.

Although additions to his collection decreased in the late 1850's, Corcoran remained active in Washington's art circles. Joseph Henry and Thomas U. Walter, the architect in charge of construction of the dome and wings of the U.S. Capitol, convinced Corcoran of the necessity of an organization in Washington through which local artists could exhibit their works. Efforts to found such an organization occupied a great deal of his time. In 1852, he gave \$1,000 to be used in the formation of the Metropolitan Me-

chanics' Institute.³ When the Institute folded five years later, the Corcoran Library Building was made available to its successor, the Washington Art Association. Corcoran also assumed all expenses incurred by the Association in its use of the building.

The stated purpose of the Washington Art Association was "to establish a 'National Gallery of Fine Arts' in the metropolis of the nation, to call the attention of the Government and the country to the neglect and the narrowness and the caprices of national patronage. . . ."⁴ Corcoran was interested in preventing the fate of the Metropolitan Mechanics' Institute from befalling the new art society. As a member of the first board of directors, he assumed a position of leadership. To reinforce the Association's goals, he lent to its first exhibition his latest acquisitions of contemporary American painting.⁵

The benefits of Corcoran's involvement with the Washington Art Association were not one-sided. His collection increased by purchasing works at the Association's annual exhibitions and he became an earnest collector of American genre painting. Corcoran remained prominent in the Washington Art Association until 1860, after which he no longer took "an active part in the management." Individuals offering to sell him works of art were told by his secretary, Anthony Hyde, that the collector had suspended making purchases for his collection. He was totally involved with his newest project: construction of a building "Dedicated to Art."

Frank B. Mayer Leisure and Labor, 1858 oil on canvas 69.65



During a trip to Europe in 1855 Corcoran saw the new wings of the Louvre, added during the reign of Napoleon III. James Renwick was in Paris and they may have viewed the Louvre together. The design of the new wings so appealed to Corcoran that Renwick was requested to create a similar structure in Washington.⁶

According to contemporary accounts of 1859, the construction of the gallery on Seventeenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue proceeded rapidly. Within two years, except for some decorative work on the pediment, the exterior was complete. By the start of the Civil War, the public was able to discern the words "Dedicated to Art," one of the first decorative elements added to the facade. The interior remained unfinished.

On April 10, 1861, still faced with a major portion of the task to complete, James Renwick received a note from Corcoran advising him to suspend the project. "There is nothing being done at the building, and in the present state of the country, nothing can be done and you will please therefore, not press the work further until you hear from me."⁷ Animosity directed towards Corcoran because of his strong advocacy of States' rights was the underlying factor which caused him to delay the construction of the building. Corcoran had almost joined the abolitionist movement and freed his slaves seven years before the Emancipation Proclamation. However, he strongly believed that the South had the right to decide whether slavery was to continue within its territories. In his judgment, politicians were responsible for the hard feelings that had grown up between Northerners and Southerners.

In spite of feeling that the South had been wronged, Corcoran never expected the issue to lead to war and bloodshed. President James Buchanan's prediction that the question of slavery would never dissolve the nation seems to have made a great impression. When the war finally erupted, Corcoran became one of its strongest opponents.

Corcoran's sympathies generated ill feeling among many of the men who came to Washington to take over the reins of government. After the outbreak of the war, resentment increased when it was learned that he continued to handle the financial affairs of several leaders of the Confederacy and entertained Southern sympathizers at his home.

The salon, formerly the picture gallery, at Mr. Corcoran's home in Washington, D.C. Photograph by Rice, 19th century Washington photographer.



Much of Corcoran's property was appropriated for Federal use. The unfinished art gallery became a center for storage and distribution of clothing. His request for rent was ignored, to become an issue again after the Civil War.

In the fall of 1861, amidst the gathering storm, Corcoran removed his valuables from the country. Silver, jewelry and securities were sent to Europe where the latter were converted into foreign currencies and reinvested in European markets. On October 8, 1862, he sailed for Europe, not to return until after the war.

He went to Europe still eager to promote art in Washington. After a short stay in Paris with his daughter, he traveled to Italy to meet American artists living abroad. He made several significant

Giuseppe Croff The Veiled Nun marble 73.9



additions to his collection, including Giuseppe Croff's *The Veiled Nun*.

The trip to Europe seems to have reduced some of the animosity that had been directed toward him, although his Southern sympathies were not forgotten by government officials. In 1863, when Corcoran expressed the wish to return to America, his secretary warned him that this would prove dangerous unless he was willing to take an oath of allegiance.

In 1865, when Corcoran returned to America, his welcome in Washington from the government was cool. Secretary of State Edwin Stanton tried to bring charges of tax evasion against him, accusing him of taking more than one million dollars out of the country. Although Stanton finally stopped the proceedings because of lack of evidence, the investigation resurrected ugly memories.

His Southern sympathies placed him in disfavor with many Government officials, despite his earlier reputation for scrupulous handling of government finances. Corcoran realized that if he wished to regain the respect and confidence of the Federal government, he would have to demonstrate willingness to forget the issues that had divided the nation and work for a united country. He decided to devote himself to completing the art gallery conceived as a center in the nation's capital for "the encouragement of the American Genius" in the fine arts.⁸

Although he endeavored to prove his love for his country, Corcoran was unable to accept the defeat of the South. He attempted to vindicate the South and heal the scars of the war. Since he felt that the South had been misrepresented in accounts of the war, he asked Albert Taylor Bledsoe, a Confederate official and editor of the *Southern Review*, to write an "accurate" history of the South.

In October, 1870, Corcoran personally organized and presided over the memorial services which were held in Washington for Robert E. Lee, a man who Corcoran believed "happily blended the qualities of the *hero* with the graces of the *Christian*."⁹

Corcoran became one of the largest contributors to the Southern Historical Society, organized in 1873 to collect and preserve documents relating to the Civil War. He felt that the morale of the defeated might be uplifted if the important role which the South had played in the nation's history was emphasized.

John A. Elder General Robert E. Lee *oil on canvas*
84.1

Thomas Sully General Andrew Jackson, 1845
oil on canvas 69.49



In 1878, with Corcoran's direction and support, proceedings began for a fitting monument to be erected to mark the grave of the third President, Thomas Jefferson. Corcoran gave the Department of State the manuscript of Jefferson's directions for construction of his monument.¹⁰ Corcoran assisted in the restoration of Mount Vernon by presenting to the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association several chairs and pieces of china believed to have belonged to Washington, plus numerous exotic trees and shrubs to beautify the grounds. Due to Corcoran, John Quincy Adams Ward's bronze copy of a plaster bust of Lafayette was presented to the Association. The Virginia Historical Society also received considerable support.

Corcoran did not neglect those who had been personally affected by the war. The Louise Home, named in memory of his deceased wife and daughter, both

of whom had died of consumption, was founded in Washington, D.C. to provide shelter and food primarily for Southern gentlewomen impoverished by the war. Countless loans were made to needy Southerners. After the war, he asked friends to recommend "the poor and destitute in your vicinity in order that they could draw upon me."¹¹ Many of the resulting loans were allowed to expire without repayment. In cases where loans were not taken, Corcoran presented outright gifts to the indigent.

At the same time he was attempting to restore the dignity of the South, he continued his efforts to appease the Federal government. Completion of the Gallery of Art was meant to show Corcoran's interest in the entire nation. The government's unwillingness to vacate the building after the war caused speculation about Corcoran's plans for the building, prompting several newspapers to note his decision to resume the project.

The keys to the building were finally placed in Corcoran's possession on September 15, 1869. Five months earlier Corcoran had decided to make his intentions known to the public. On May 19, nine men gathered in the library of Corcoran's home on Lafayette Square to hear him formally announce these plans. In a letter read at this meeting, Corcoran informed James M. Carlisle, James C. Hall, George W. Riggs, Anthony Hyde, James G. Berret, James C. Kennedy, Henry C. Cooke and James C. McGuire that they had been chosen as the Board of Trustees of the new Corcoran Gallery of Art which he was creating "to be 'Dedicated to Art,' and used solely

for the purpose of encouraging American genius in the production and preservation of works pertaining to the 'Fine Arts,' and kindred objects."¹² The idea of forming an art gallery in Washington devoted to the development of art had been a "long cherished desire" of its founder. The Board of Trustees was to be responsible for organizing and administering the institution, for hiring qualified individuals to assist it, and for ensuring above all the "Perpetual establishment and maintenance of a Public Gallery and Museum for the promotion and encouragement of the arts of painting and sculpture and the fine arts generally."¹³ The public was to be allowed to view the collection without paying any admission fee two days a week, while only a small fee was to be charged the remainder of the time the institution was open. Corcoran donated his private art collection to the Gallery to form the nucleus of its permanent collection.

As one of its first duties, the Board was asked to apply to Congress for a charter of incorporation so a trust might be established. Such an act would free the Gallery of taxation on its properties and would enable it to recover the rent owed by the Federal Government for use of the building during the war.

Reaction to Corcoran's proposals was immediate. By the beginning of June, James Renwick was asked to complete the building. The new Board quickly began preparing its application for incorporation as well as its claim for reimbursement for the Government's use of the art building during the war.

The Act of Incorporation, granted May 24, 1870, provided that "fair and just compensation" be awarded. The question of rent due on the building had always presented difficulties.¹⁴ Although Corcoran and his board were not legally able to force the government to settle the claim, their efforts to do so dissipated to some extent the good feelings generated among Federal officials by creation of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. After much discussion and dispute, in April, 1872, the Trustees decided to accept the \$125,000 offered by the Federal government, because the money was needed to continue work on the building. Their decision was contrary to Corcoran's wishes, but he was too ill then to involve himself directly in the issue.

The Federal government's continued acts of harassment, of which the denial of adequate reimbursement was the most obvious, was to bear a great influence on Corcoran's actions throughout the remainder of his life. The founder realized that if the Corcoran Gallery of Art was to function it would have to receive financial assistance from the Federal government. According to Corcoran, the Gallery was not receiving assistance because of his support of the Confederacy. To convince Congress and the Administration of his interest in the welfare of the entire nation, he became an extremely active member of the Washington Monument Society, and allowed the art gallery, still under construction, to be used for a fund-raising ball.

Among the plans presented for the Washington Monument was that of the American sculptor, W. W.

Old Corcoran Gallery of Art building at the corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, now the Renwick Gallery, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution. The statues by Moses Ezekiel were installed between 1879 and 1884.



Story. Dissatisfied with the design of a simple obelisk, he suggested the existing structure be made into a tower with an attached portico. The portico was to be decorated with statues of Liberty, Washington, and portraits of Revolutionary heroes including scenes of the war. Story's idea appealed to Corcoran, who by then considered himself a connoisseur of all art forms. The suggestions made by innumerable architects and lobbyists were placed before a Committee of Congress. Frustration among the members became so great they finally decided that the Monument be an obelisk. Although upset because the "friends of the chimney had prevailed," Corcoran continued to make significant loans to the project and was responsible for its completion in 1884.

To show further his patriotism Corcoran wished to honor American heroes. In 1883 he arranged to have the body of John Howard Payne brought from its place of burial in Tunisia to Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown. Prior to reinterment, Payne's remains lay in state in the Grand Salon of the Corcoran Gallery of Art for one day in June, 1884. Public reaction to the reinterment of Payne's body was so favorable that a year later Corcoran tried to persuade Congress to undertake a similar project with the remains of Pierre L'Enfant. As with Payne, Corcoran had been a friend of the city planner, but sufficient support was never shown by Congress to realize Corcoran's dream within his lifetime.¹⁵

Although his involvement with the Washington Monument Society and with the projects to reinter

John Howard Payne and Pierre L'Enfant helped diminish Government officials' animosity, Corcoran was most successful in surmounting the Federal government's ill will by the programs he instituted at the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

The Gallery building was first opened on February 20, 1871, with a gala ball for the benefit of the Washington Monument Society, which President U. S. Grant attended. The inauguration as an art gallery did not take place until January 19, 1874, when an initial exhibition of 98 paintings and sculptures was opened, again in the presence of the President. By the end of that year, the entire Gallery was open to the public and the collection on exhibit increased to more than 300 works of art, the great majority from the original collection of Mr. Corcoran.

The public and press responded favorably to the Gallery and the collection. Newspapers of the day were unanimous in their praise and acclaim of the founder and his gallery. Visitors flocked to the first art gallery in the nation's capital. Artists and students added to the crowds who viewed the works of art so generously given to the nation.

With the formation of the Gallery, Corcoran formally relinquished purchasing power to the Trustees' Committee of the Works of Art and, initially, did not require he be informed of decisions made by the Committee or by William MacLeod, the first curator. Corcoran's primary concern lay in guaranteeing that finances were available for acquisitions, and for ma-

*A newspaper account
Washington D.C., presumably the Evening Star.*

CORCORAN ART GALLERY

ITS OPENING TO THE WASHINGTON PUBLIC YESTERDAY.

Gloom Without, Brilliancy Within—Distinguished
Visitors In Attendance—Reception By Its Founder—The
Pictures And Statuary—Great Works by Great Masters—
A Little Disposition To Criticise.

Yesterday, in its weather aspect, was an exceedingly unpropitious day for the opening of the Corcoran Art Gallery. The sky was dark and gloomy, the atmosphere damp and chilly, and pedestrianism anything but pleasant or inviting in view of the muddy streets and sloppy pavements. But these serious drawbacks did not prevent hundreds of invited guests from availing themselves of the privilege of visiting the fine collections of paintings and statuary which, through the munificence of W. W. Corcoran, Esq., now adorn the magnificent gallery which he has caused to be "dedicated to art," and which will long survive him as one of the noblest and grandest of his splendid contributions to the adornment of the nation capital.

for projects such as the purchase of land for an annex to the Gallery, to contain a portrait collection.

In the years after the creation of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the founder encouraged the Committee of the Works of Art to acquire portraits of individuals of national stature, to form a national portrait gallery at the Corcoran. He felt that a selection of

such portraits would prove to Congress "how national in character the institution was."¹⁶

Corcoran's desire to form a national portrait gallery was not made public until 1879 when he had William MacLeod write an article for the *Washington Evening Star* (May 3) in which MacLeod reiterated Corcoran's idea that the main objective of the Corcoran Gallery of Art was to collect portraits of national heroes:

As our great men pass away, it is well not only to have authentic portraits but to gather them in such an abiding place as the Corcoran Gallery of Art, here in the metropolis of the nation, ever to remain on free exhibition to the public.

According to MacLeod's article, Corcoran felt that the Gallery should not only foster American art, but also should act as a memorial to great Americans.

Between 1874 and 1885, the founder purchased for the Corcoran Gallery of Art portraits of all of the presidents of the United States and many famous statesmen. Several months after the formation of the Gallery, Corcoran acquired a portrait of Andrew Jackson by Thomas Sully.

Due to illness, Corcoran's next major acquisition for the Corcoran Gallery, the St. Memin collection of portraits, did not occur until 1875. A year earlier the collection of 818 proof engravings of "likenesses of the first families in America, especially many

C. B. Févret de St. Mémin Lord and Lady Kennedy
engraving 75.16



distinguished members of Congress and the government” had been offered to the Library of Congress. When the Library decided not to purchase them, the librarian, A. R. Spoffard, informed Corcoran of the opportunity. The collector recognized their historical importance and purchased them immediately.

Corcoran’s most significant contribution to the Gallery’s portrait collection was acquisition of Presidential portraits by George P. A. Healy. In January, 1879, Corcoran purchased from Thomas B. Bryan, a Chicago collector, fifteen portraits of the Presidents of the United States, a portrait of Martha Washington, and one of George Peabody. Of the Presidential portraits, eleven had been commissioned from Healy in 1842 by Louis Philippe I, King of France, for the palace at Versailles, but before delivery of the paintings the King was deposed by the Revolution of 1848. Bryan bought the portraits from the artist in 1860 and commissioned him to update the series. In 1884, President Chester Arthur requested that

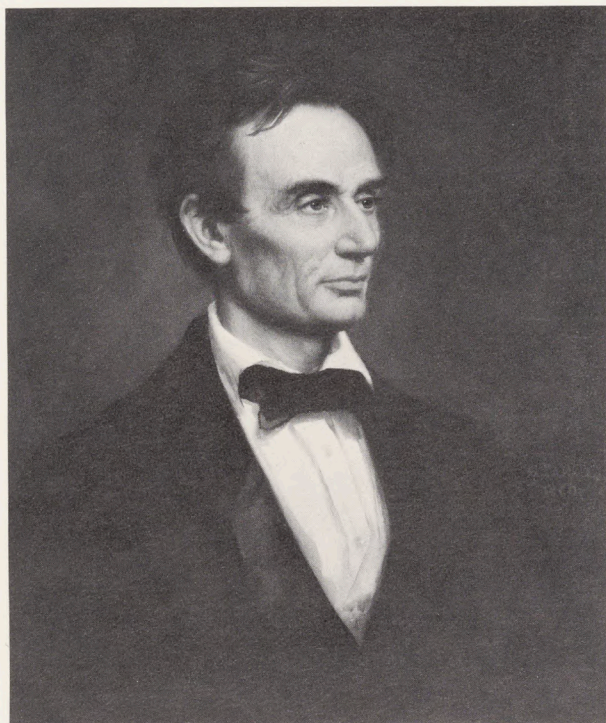
Corcoran ask Healy to paint his portrait as twenty-first President of the United States.

In addition to the Presidential portraits, the national portrait gallery was to contain paintings of famous American statesmen. Preference for realistic likenesses moved the patron to ask Healy to furnish the Gallery with portraits of prominent Washingtonians. Although portraits of famous men were the most desirable, Corcoran was also “anxious to have specimens of the work of the best portrait painters of our country in this Gallery. . . .”

Corcoran realized more space would be required to house the portrait collection, and instructed the Committee of the Works of Art to exercise restraint in its purchasing activities and set aside money to purchase land adjacent to the Gallery on Pennsylvania Avenue. Some lots were purchased, but the key lot — near Blair House — would not be relinquished by Samuel P. Lee, and Corcoran had to abandon his plan to build an annex for the portrait collection.

Concern for an outstanding collection of portraits went with a desire for the Gallery to own representative works of America’s most exemplary artists. To include as many artists as possible, Corcoran did not want the Gallery to purchase more than one work of each artist. After acquisition of a portrait of Washington attributed to Gilbert Stuart, the Gallery was offered several others, but Corcoran requested they not be purchased because “there is already in the Corcoran Gallery of Art an original portrait of

George P. A. Healy Abraham Lincoln, 1860
oil on canvas 79.19



Washington by Stuart and a copy." Corcoran considered Jane Stuart's copy of her father's Lansdowne portrait of George Washington equal in technical skill to any executed by her father. Where Corcoran saw a weakness in the collection attempts were made to rectify the situation.

The role of the Corcoran Gallery of Art as a repository in the nation's capital for American master-

pieces caused artists to believe it was a great honor to have their works included in the collection. They sometimes went to great lengths to persuade the Gallery and the founder of the quality of their work.

Albert Bierstadt realized the only way he could convince the Gallery to purchase one of his paintings was to appeal to the founder. In June, 1877, Bierstadt brought to the patron's home a landscape painting based on sketches he made six years earlier during a trip through the West. According to Bierstadt, the work, entitled *Mount Corcoran*, depicted an actual mountain in the Sierra Nevada range. To prove the mountain existed, Bierstadt showed Corcoran War Department maps on which appeared "Mt. Corcoran," named by the artist during a surveying expedition. Good relations between artist and patron were further established by the presentation of an engraving to Corcoran, who was so impressed by Bierstadt's attentions that he had the painting placed on exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art as a loan from the artist.

MacLeod distrusted Bierstadt immensely. The first time he saw the landscape, he thought *Mount Corcoran* was a retouched version of a work which Bierstadt had tried unsuccessfully to sell to the Gallery several years earlier. He soon discovered that the painting was a recent work by Bierstadt, but he was told that the War Department maps had been falsified and that "Mount Corcoran" did not exist.¹⁷

After the work had been exhibited in the Gallery, Bierstadt informed MacLeod that if he were not

Albert Bierstadt Mt. Corcoran, 1875-76 oil on canvas
78.1



paid \$15,000 he would have to remove the painting. "I would of course prefer to have it remain in Washington but I cannot give it to the institution although I have the greatest admiration for the man and think I have done well by him in naming one of our finest mountains after him." Faced with the prospect of

losing the painting which bore his name, Corcoran decided to purchase the work for his home. Bierstadt was unwilling to sell unless the landscape remained in the Corcoran Gallery of Art, so Corcoran finally submitted to his request and after purchasing the work for \$7,000, presented it to the Gallery. Bierstadt wrote to Samuel Ward:

I have just come from a visit to Mr. Corcoran and was much pleased with my reception. If he was aware of how all true artists regard him and his noble charity in the cause of art he could not fail to be gratified to know how all the votaries of art in this country and in Europe feel toward Mr. Corcoran as a generous patron and worthy of the days of the Medici.

I think I speak the minds of all when I say that the greatest living painters would take great pride in being represented in the Corcoran Institution by the best work they can produce and at a cost far less than, to any private person or dealer for they would refer their friends to that gallery as representing their best efforts. Mr. Corcoran and the true artists of the world are allies or friends at heart.¹⁸

Corcoran wished the collection to have exemplary works of art, European as well as American. Casts of major pieces of sculpture seemed most desirable. The Smithsonian Institution agreed to assist the Corcoran Gallery and in 1874 Joseph Henry, first Secretary of the Smithsonian and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Corcoran, was asked to make arrangements for securing casts from the British Museum, the Vatican, and other European collections.

William T. Walters, a friend of Corcoran's for many years, was sent to Europe in 1873 to acquire European art, and was given full power to purchase by

his fellow Trustees. Five years later Walters retired from the Board of Trustees in order to devote his time to opening his private collection in Baltimore, and as a result, in spite of ill health and old age, Corcoran played a more active role in acquisitions.

Corcoran's plans for the Gallery were two-fold: to establish a repository in the nation's capital for portraits of American heroes and outstanding examples of contemporary American art and to found a school of art which would allow future American artists to utilize the Gallery's permanent collection to perfect their own styles.

The idea of a school of design to accompany the Gallery had been conceived early in the institution's history. In 1873 a group of Washington artists who requested that a school of instruction be provided for them was told that plans for an art school were being formulated. Several months later a group of seven artists sent a petition to Corcoran asking for studio space near the Gallery. Stating that they understood the founder's purpose to be "the creation of a more general interest in art and by this the tastes of the people," they wrote that the founder ought to:

... go one direct step further in this direction by the erection of a Studio Building in the neighborhood of the Gallery. The most powerful influence upon the development of art as well as upon the taste and interest of the people in art matters, would soon become manifest in

Corcoran School of Art class, circa 1890, poses with professor Andrews in the Renwick Gallery of Art.



consequences of such a building. The artist's work while growing, would permanently be under the critical eyes of his brother artists and thus the whole little community from perhaps feeble beginning, would rise in creative power and knowledge.¹⁹

Aware of the desirability of placing artists together in order to exchange ideas, Corcoran and the Board of Trustees decided to add two rooms to the Gallery which would be used by artists who were copying art works in the building. Corcoran recognized this was not sufficient, and decided that the wing to be

added to the Gallery would have to house not only the national portrait gallery but also an art school. Samuel P. Lee's refusal to sell his lot placed a damper on this project. In October, 1884, Corcoran reiterated his request that money be set aside to purchase land. After Corcoran's death, the Board of Trustees resumed negotiations for additional real estate. In his will, Corcoran gave \$100,000, which, according to an accompanying letter, was to be used for the creation of an art school. He did not live to see the founding, but his original concept and sole endowment made possible the School of Art which bears his name.

Louis Mattieu D. Guillaume William Wilson Corcoran,
ca. 1875 oil on canvas Collection of Washington and
Lee University

*The library of the home of William Wilson Corcoran.
Hanging above the bookcase is the portrait of
Mr. Corcoran by Louis Matthieu D. Guillaume, ca. 1875.
Bishop Pinckney's portrait hangs to the left. Photograph
by Rice, 19th century Washington photographer.*



As he advanced in age, Corcoran's preoccupation with the Gallery did not prevent the founder from involving himself in other art-oriented organizations in Washington, which reinforced publicly his desire to promote art appreciation. In 1877 he became the first president of the Washington Art Club. His support of this society included allowing its members to use the Corcoran Office Building for meetings and donating to it the revenues collected at the Thursday night exhibitions in the Gallery.

After the Civil War, Corcoran tried to encourage the careers of Southern artists, especially those who had

fought for the Confederacy. Moses Ezekiel was commissioned to do the sculpture for the niches of the facade of the Corcoran Gallery of Art because of his Southern sympathies. In 1882 a proposal was passed that a medallion profile bust of Corcoran be placed on the pediment of the Gallery. Corcoran sent Ezekiel photographs of himself by Rice as well as views of his bust on which John Quincy Adams Ward was currently working. Since neither of these presented faithful renditions, Corcoran had Matthew Brady take his photograph in 1883 for this purpose. In June, Corcoran received a copy of Ezekiel's plans for the tympanum. Although the general layout of

the pediment was satisfactory, to his dismay the profile was unflattering:

It is not considered a pleasant thing to look at or a portrait to be recognized, the head is too much inclined, that is, the forehead thrown back and the chin protruded, and the general expression amounting to a scowl, is neither what my friends or myself desire.²⁰

Additional photographs were sent to Ezekiel and work continued on the sculptural design. By the end of the year, the sculpture was ready to be shipped to Washington, to be placed on the exterior of the building, where it remains to this day along with the monogram of the founder.

The extent of the success of Corcoran's programs was recognized during the last years of his life. Future generations would evaluate him as a collector and patron of the arts in Washington, D.C. In his lifetime little criticism was leveled at his collection. Severe criticism of the Gallery did not occur until 1884, when the *New York Sun* printed an editorial which stated that Corcoran had made the Gallery an "artistic morgue." According to the article, since Corcoran had no knowledge of art, he had allowed his beneficence to determine the nature of the Gallery's collection and had placed himself at the mercy of every success-seeking artist who appeared. The article stated, "The intrigues of designing women, of incompetent artists, and of people for whom Mr. Corcoran has a certain utility, supply the influences which control the Corcoran Gallery."

19th century view of the painting gallery, old Corcoran Gallery of Art, from an illustration which appeared in the New York Daily Graphic, March 21, 1874.

19th century view of the painting gallery, old Corcoran Gallery of Art, today the Renwick Gallery, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution.



Artistic taste in the United States of America underwent several changes during the first hundred years of the existence of the new country. From colonial times portraiture had dominated artistic expression and patronage. Early in the nineteenth century, collectors purchased European masterpieces, to give status to themselves and to their country. Later, new

collectors on the Eastern seaboard purchased American landscape and genre scenes, works easily appreciated by businessmen with money to spend. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the desire of American patrons to own contemporary French and German art gained such momentum that these works comprised a major part of many important collections. For various reasons and with growing confidence, Corcoran increasingly patronized American artists. Other patrons of American art did not acquire exclusively works of one subject matter but Corcoran purchased first-rate portraits of his countrymen, realizing their importance for himself and later generations. His wish to form a national portrait gallery in the nation's capital, to house portraits of the country's heroes, furthered a national interest in American art.

When William Wilson Corcoran died in 1888 at the age of eighty-nine, he was recognized throughout the country as a great benefactor. He was lauded for his assistance to the widowed and the orphaned. Principally he was praised for promoting an interest in Washington in art. Through his own collection and formation of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Corcoran created one of the great collections of American painting and sculpture and an institution without precedent in American art. The dual intentions of the founder were to elevate public taste through the contemplation of art and to educate through the school. In the fine arts William Wilson Corcoran was among the first to promote and encourage "the American Genius."

The essay on William Wilson Corcoran is based on two years research by Davira Spiro Taragin. Revised and edited by the Director and his staff, the published essay contains a selection of the original footnotes. Mrs. Taragin's research came from various sources, particularly the letters of W. W. Corcoran; the Deed, Charter, journals and records of the Corcoran Gallery of Art; the Smithsonian Institution Archives; and publications and papers of the time.

Footnotes

¹ Reverend Philip Slaughter, "William Wilson Corcoran," *The Old Dominion*, 1870, p. 648.

² Prior to 1849, Corcoran had made several acquisitions of single works of art. For example, during a business trip to Europe in 1848 he purchased "upon the recommendation of a connoisseur (sic)," a portrait of an unidentified lady by Sir Peter Lely. Old Register of Paintings, no. 64.

³ Josephine Cobb, "The Washington Art Association: An Exhibition Record," Record of the Columbia Historical Society, 1963-1965 (Washington, D.C.; Columbia Historical Society, 1965), p. 122-190, passim; Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to Joseph Henry, Vol. 4, October 21, 1852, Letterpress Copies, William Wilson Corcoran Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to Charles Stansbury, Vol. 5, February 10, 1853, Letterpress Copies, L.C.; Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to Joseph Henry, June 11, 1869, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Joseph Henry Papers.

⁴ Mary Jay Windle, *Life in Washington and Life Here and There*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1859, p. 147.

⁵ See *Catalogue of the Works of Art Comprising the First Annual Exhibition of the Washington Art Association* (Washington, 1856).

⁶ James Goode, "The Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution." Historic American Buildings Survey (Washington, D. C., Smithsonian Institution, Department of the Interior, 1971), p. 1.

⁷ Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to James Renwick, Vol 20, April 10, 1861, Letterpress Copies, L.C.

⁸ Corcoran Gallery of Art, Deed and Charter of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, May 18, 1869.

⁹ After the Civil War Corcoran who was a close friend of Lee spent several summers at White Sulphur Springs with the former Confederate general. Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to Professor J. J. White, Vol. 49, May 16, 1879, Letterpress Copies, L.C.

¹⁰ Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to The Honorable Charles Devens, Vol. 48, November 7, 1878, Letterpress Copies, L.C.

¹¹ Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to Thomas Clemson, Vol. 26, April 18, 1867, Letterpress Copies, L.C.

¹² Deed and Charter of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to James M. Carlisle, James C. Hall, George W. Riggs, Anthony Hyde, James G. Berret, James C. Kennedy, Henry C. Cooke, and James C. McGuire, May 10, 1869, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Journal of the Official Proceedings of the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Claim Against the Government for Rent*, passim; Letter, Anthony Hyde to Robert Ould, Vol. 34, April 6, 1872, Letterpress Copies, L.C.

¹⁵ In 1909 Pierre L'Enfant's remains were reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery.

¹⁶ Corcoran Gallery of Art, Curator's Journals, April 28, 1879.

¹⁷ There has been confusion over the years as to the existence of Mt. Corcoran. The National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior, however, has stated the name Mt. Corcoran has been applied to a peak in the Sierra Nevada range about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile northwest of Mt. Langley, and it appears on all U.S. Geological Survey maps of Sequoia Park since 1937. Mt. Corcoran and Mt. Langley can be found in the western section of the USGS topographic map (15 minute series) entitled Lone Pine, California.

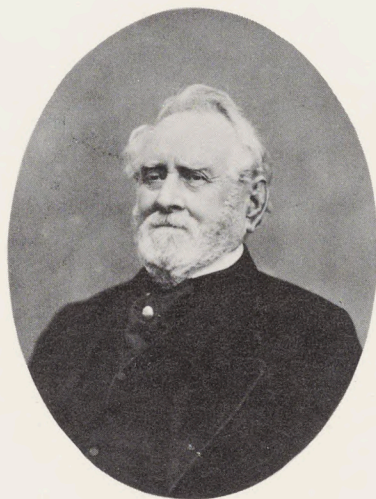
¹⁸ Letter, Albert Bierstadt to Samuel Ward, Vol. 20, January 18, 1878, William Wilson Corcoran Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁹ Letter, Henry Ulke, Theodore Kaufmann and others to William Wilson Corcoran, June 1, 1874, Corcoran Gallery of Art archives.

²⁰ Letter, William Wilson Corcoran to Moses Ezekiel, Vol. 57, June 25, 1883, Letterpress Copies, L.C.

Matthew B. Brady Mr. William Wilson Corcoran
photograph, 1883

*A newspaper account dated February 25, 1888,
Washington D.C., presumably the Evening Star.*



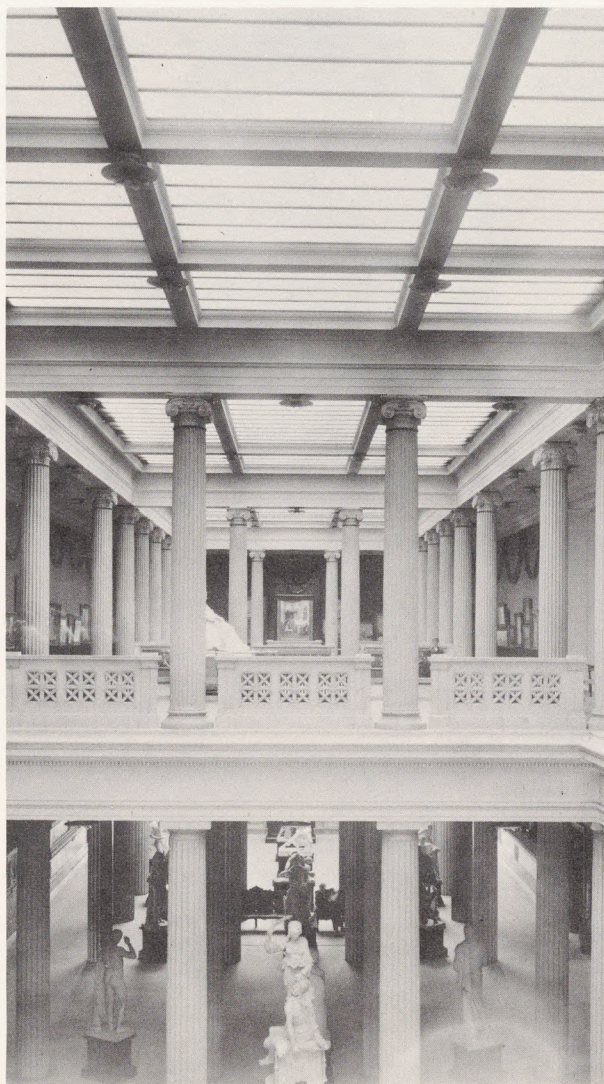
William Wilson Corcoran, Washington's most distinguished and best-loved citizen, has closed a long life that was full of good works. He was so much to Washington, and Washington so much to him, that the man and the city seemed indissolubly associated; and in one sense—the best sense—that seeming was a reality. No other name except that which the Capital bears, no other memory except that of the Father of our Republic, are so dear to the hearts of the people of this city.

It is hard for Washingtonians to think or speak of Mr. Corcoran in the past tense. Surrounded by monuments of his munificence, by tangible results of his life work; seeing on every side the public benefactions which his brain planned, his hand wrought and over which his great heart rejoiced, it is not easy to disassociate the living source of all this from the benefactions themselves.

Mr. Corcoran lived for others, and in so living he made a perpetuity of fame more sure than he could have done if the chief end of his existence had been to win renown. It is only in a narrow sense that such a life as his may be said to end with the cessation of the vital functions. The good influences that he set in motion, the institutions that he founded and endowed, will all move on as if his mind were still directly and controlling them.

The Corcoran Art Gallery, the great national educational establishment on which he bestowed so much thought, will influence the taste, the character and lives of thousands in every year of all the centuries to come. Who can estimate the grand aggregate of such influences? How many lives will be brighter and better; how many homes will be happier; how much of the increasing exaltation and embellishment of American social life, as the years go on, will be due to Mr. Corcoran's wise benevolence in establishing a great temple of art where the poor as well as the rich may study the works of the masters?

The Corcoran Gallery of Art was originally housed on Seventeenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, now the Renwick Gallery. After the death of the founder the Trustees realized the need for a larger gallery and moved to the present building on Seventeenth Street and New York Avenue.



THE EVENING STAR
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1897

THOUSANDS VIEW IT

Brilliant Throng at the Opening of the Art Gallery

MANY DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Arrangement of the Art Treasures Generally Approved

A MEMORABLE EVENT

The opening of the new Corcoran Gallery of Art last night was an event that will be memorable to every one who enjoyed the pleasure of participating in it. Probably no institution devoted to aesthetic purposes was ever inaugurated in a manner more in harmony with its objects. The vast halls whose walls inclosed chaste conceptions of the chisel or striking creations of the brush held at the same time a living, breathing animated assemblage of individual portraits that presented altogether a composite picture of the national capital in which every phase of its remarkable life was depicted. The representatives of the masses and the representatives of the classes, if such distinctions are permissible; the clerk and the capitalist; the merchant and the millionaire; the man of labor and the man of leisure, each accompanied by his wife, his mother, his sister—or somebody else's sister—were all present and mingled in common appreciation of the inanimate beauties around them.

Admission to the gallery was by card, each card admitting a gentleman and ladies, and from a survey of the assemblage at 10 o'clock it seemed as though every one of the 3,090 invitations issued had been taken advantage of by a man and at least two ladies. The intensely disagreeable weather apparently had no effect on the holders of the cards. Before 8 o'clock the hour named for the doors to open, there were probably 200 people crowded under the canvas passage way from the curb on 17th street to the art gallery entrance, and as many more in the rain that beat down steadily outside.

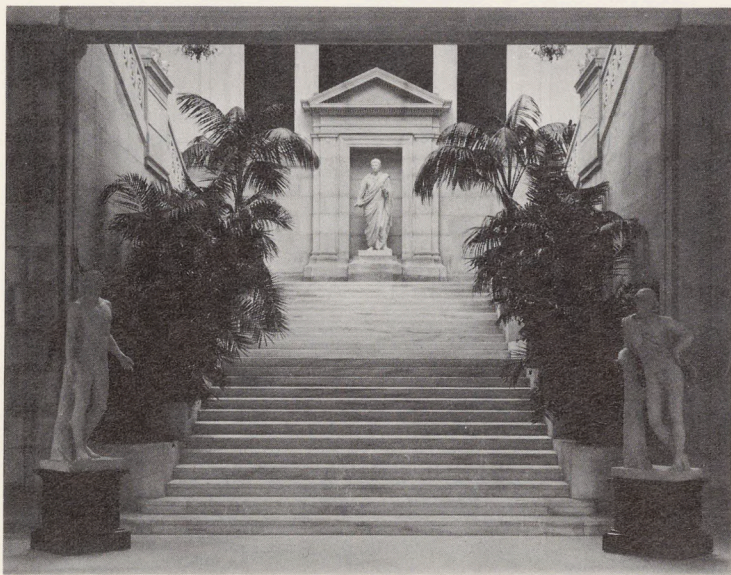
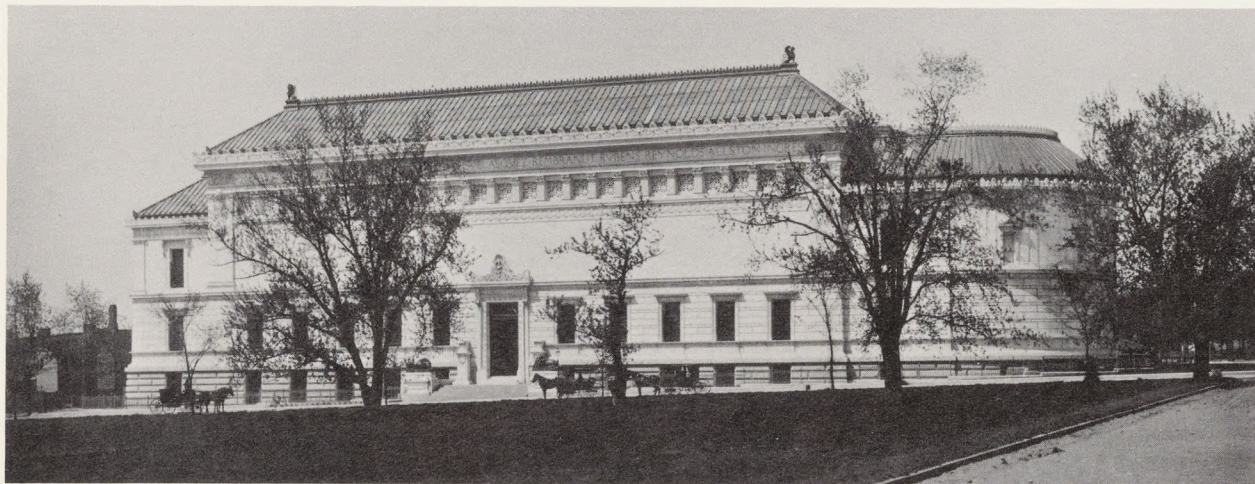
A Great Throng

The two hours from 8 to 10 saw a steady stream of visitors pouring through the broad doorway, and at the latter hour a line of carriages extended up 17th street to H, with the exception of the space across Pennsylvania avenue. These contained guests from dinner parties, teas and other functions uptown, which poured their attractive humanity into the gallery during the last hour. Almost every visitor signaled entrance to the building with an exclamation of surprise and admiration. The interior was bright with the luster of countless electric lights, lending a newer and more effective attraction to the numerous marbles and casts which occupy the lower floor on either side of the main entrance. Further progress through the building only served to heighten the good impression first received. The magnificent marble stairway that arises through the center of the building by easy stages to the picture galleries above was banked on either side with palms, rubber plants and other attractive foliage growths, and arranged with an artistic taste that was well in keeping with the surroundings.

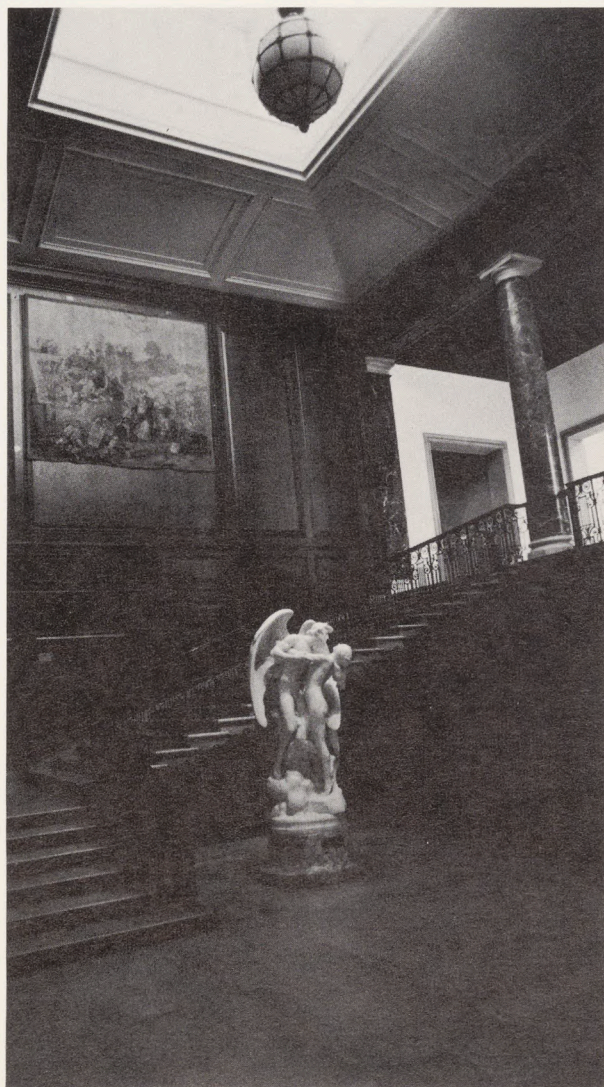
Exterior view Corcoran Gallery of Art, soon after the construction was completed.

Grand Staircase before Clark addition.

Present view of grand staircase.



Clark staircase.



The Corcoran Gallery of Art

The Corcoran is one of the oldest art museums in the United States and the first in the nation's capital. Its collections were started by a man with the foresight to realize, in the nineteenth century, that American art was worth preserving for posterity: William Wilson Corcoran.

The original building erected to display the collections was an imposing brick structure with brownstone trim, designed by New York architects James Renwick, Jr. and R. T. Auchmuty and located a block from the White House at the northeast corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The inauguration of the gallery took place on January 19, 1874.

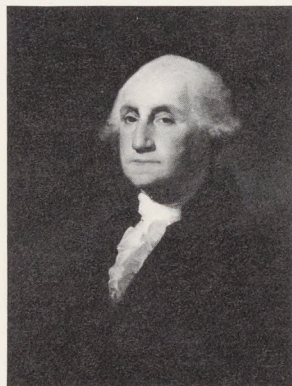
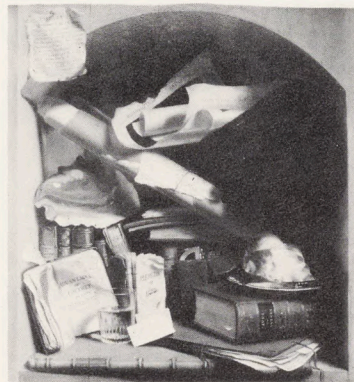
In addition to the buildings and grounds, which cost \$250,000, and his personal art collection, then valued at \$100,000, Mr. Corcoran assigned to the new Board of Trustees, under his deed of Gift of May 10, 1869, an endowment of \$900,000 to be used for "the perpetual establishment and maintenance" of the Gallery.

In 1891, when it became apparent that the existing buildings were no longer adequate for the growing needs of the Gallery and Art School, the Trustees resolved to acquire land for a new, larger building. The site of the present Corcoran Gallery of Art, also close to the White House on 17th Street at New York Avenue, was purchased on April 3 of that year, and the design of the new building was subsequently entrusted to New York architect Ernest Flagg. Ground was broken on June 26, 1893, the

Charles Bird King Poor Artist's Cupboard, ca. 1815
oil on canvas 55.93

Gilbert Stuart George Washington oil on canvas
02.3

Samuel F. B. Morse The Old House of Representatives,
1822 oil on canvas 11.14



cornerstone was laid on May 10 of the following year, and on February 22, 1897, the new building, with ample facilities for an expanded School of Art, was inaugurated with a reception attended by President Grover Cleveland and members of his Cabinet. Today one of the most distinguished architectural landmarks in the nation's capital, the new Gallery was constructed in a style described as Neo-Grecian, of Georgia white marble above a base of Milford pink granite. By the time of the inauguration of its new building, the collection of the Corcoran, as listed in its 1897 catalogue, had more than doubled, to a total of over 700 items.

In March 1901 the Trustees sold the original Gallery building to the United States Government for \$300,000. For many years the building was used by the U.S. Court of Claims. Later, after considerable restoration, the building was renamed after the architect and, in 1972, opened as the Renwick Gallery of the National Collection of Fine Arts, the Smith-

sonian Institution, to show American decorative arts, crafts and design.

One of the oldest and most important art shows in the United States had its inception at the Corcoran in January, 1906, when the Trustees authorized the first Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Painting. The exhibition was opened on February 6, 1907, the first in a regular series of Corcoran Biennials which without interruption has continued to the present day. The stated purpose of that first exhibition was in keeping with William Wilson Corcoran's original Gallery dedication: as set forth in the foreword to the catalogue, the first Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Painting was organized and presented by the Corcoran Gallery "in recognition of the just claim of American Art to rank with the best Art of the world, and to promote and encourage its further development."

Launching the Biennial series was a significant manifestation of awakening interest and faith in the

Jean Baptiste Corot La Bacchante au Tambourin, 1860
oil on canvas 26.41 Bequest of William A. Clark

Giacomo Mancini (El Frate) Salome with the Head of
St. John Deruta, c. 1515-25 26.328 W. A. Clark
Collection

William Merritt Chase The Honorable William A.
Clark oil on canvas 17.3 Gift of William A. Clark



American artist and his work. The Corcoran Biennial has made a critical contribution to the emergence and recognition of American painting. In the Biennials one finds a virtual "Who's Who" of American painting of the past sixty years.

In 1925 the Trustees accepted the bequest of the late Senator from Montana, William Andrews Clark, of his collection of art. A generous gift of his widow, daughters and other members of the Clark family of \$700,000 was used to build an addition to the Corcoran Gallery building to house the collection. The fine collection, valued at the time between three and five million dollars, included nearly 200 paintings, watercolors, and drawings by such artists as Corot, Daumier, Degas, Gainsborough, Rembrandt, Reynolds, Turner, and Van Dyke, together with sculpture, tapestries and rugs, antiques, and stained glass windows. The architect engaged to design the new wing was Charles A. Platt of New York; work was begun in December, 1925, and completed in



Edgar Degas Ballet School oil on canvas 26.74
Bequest of William A. Clark

Claude Monet Willows of Vetheuil oil on canvas
37.37 Bequest of Edward C. and Mary Walker

John Singer Sargent Study of a Figure for Hell,
the Boston Public Library Decoration, charcoal 49.99



1927. The Clark Collection was inaugurated on March 10, 1928, in the presence of a distinguished gathering of guests, headed by President Calvin Coolidge. Through the further generosity of the Clark family an Endowment Fund of \$400,000 was established the following year for maintenance of the Clark Collection and the Clark Wing.

Senator Clark, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Gallery, had donated \$100,000 in 1921 to perpetuate the "William A. Clark Prize Awards" for the Biennial, and his widow gave an equal sum in 1927 as a trust fund to be used to help defray the recurring expenses of that exhibition.

The Walker Collection, formed by Edward C. and Mary Walker, added important French impressionist masters to the collections of the Gallery including works by Renoir, Monet and Pissaro. Over the years many donors have generously enriched the museum's collection by gifts of art works and contributions for acquisition.

In 1930, in an effort to define more precisely the artistic orientation of the Gallery, the Trustees adopted a resolution reaffirming the emphasis of the Gallery on American art. Although the Gallery would continue to accept "good works of foreign art" as gifts, and even purchase such works "in rare instances when an unusual opportunity presents itself," it was resolved that, in general, acquisitions by purchase would be confined to American works. The resolution also called for establishment of a collection of "drawings and studies" and encouraged the development of an etching and print collection. Emphasis on American art was further embodied in a centennial restatement of Gallery policy adopted by the Trustees in 1959.

To further the Corcoran's role as a community institution the "Association of the Corcoran Gallery of Art" was established in February, 1947, to provide a structure for individual and group memberships in the Gallery. Creation of a membership structure was intended to stimulate community interest in the

Corcoran by giving Washingtonians an opportunity to participate in Gallery activities and to provide more broad-based financial support for the Gallery.

In 1952, a "Women's Committee" was founded with the stated purpose of "advancing the growth of the Gallery and extending its usefulness as a cultural and educational institution." The Women's Committee developed into a major resource of the Corcoran: establishing the Education Department; creating the Corcoran Shop; sponsoring the Annual Corcoran Ball and lecture series; acquiring works of art; providing student scholarships and awards; expanding the School library and workshop facilities; supporting restoration; and giving over-all financial assistance for many projects in the Gallery and School.

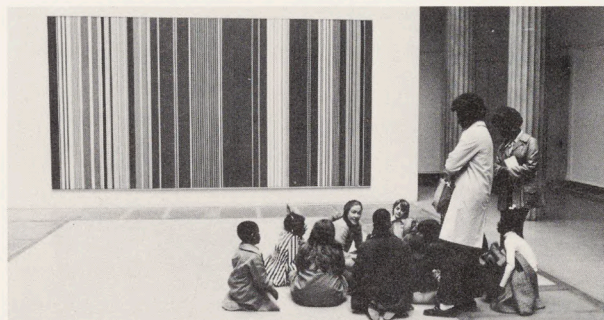
Art education had been one of the aims of the Corcoran Gallery since Mr. Corcoran first laid down its artistic and material foundation, but the function of art education outside the confines of the Art School, by the systematic explication of the Gallery collections and exhibitions, to school children, students, and visitors, was slow to develop. Docent service, providing trained guides and lecturers, was instituted on an informal basis during the late twenties. Following World War II the Gallery's educational program steadily expanded. In the field of children's education particular progress was made through the Women's Committee of the Corcoran, whose Docent Program assumed responsibility for recruiting and training volunteer docents. In 1965 the Women's Committee gave the Gallery the funds

*A docent leads a group of school children through a tour.
Education Department.*

*Children's Photography Workshop, Education
Department.*

*The Corcoran "Art Maze" at the District of Columbia
Bicentennial City Celebration, October 13, 1974.
Education Department.*

*Annual Corcoran Ball, 1974 organized by the Corcoran's
Women's Committee. Photo Washington Star.*



necessary to establish a much-needed Education Department to organize and supervise the Gallery's educational activities, including the Docent Service.

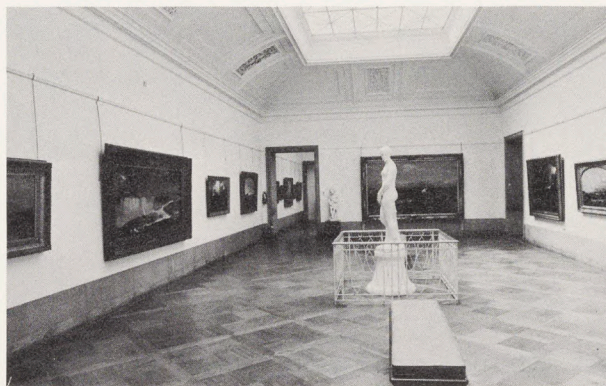
The "Friends of the Corcoran," a group of civic-minded and artistically-oriented citizens, was formed in 1961, devoted to adding important works by contemporary American artists to the collection. Through increasing and diverse activity, and with major acquisitions of art, the Women's Committee and the Friends of the Corcoran both continue their support, making a significant and vital contribution to the institution.

During the 1960s the Trustees considered at length the problem of enlarging the Board of Trustees, or otherwise broadening the direction of the Gallery at the Trustee level, in order to keep pace with greatly increased activities and responsibilities. The decision was made in 1968 to create a Board of Governors, to "act as agents of the Trustees in carrying out the trusts, intents, uses and purposes of the Deed of Gift."

As part of the same reorganization of the Corcoran structure, the Corcoran School of Art, previously an adjunct to the Gallery, was placed on equal footing, as a complementary instead of subordinate part of the Corcoran complex. The Director was made responsible for the Gallery with the Dean responsible for the School.

Gallery A6 in present installation of the American Collection.

*Louise Nevelson Ancient Secrets, 1964 wood 68.49
Gift of the Friends of the Corcoran.*

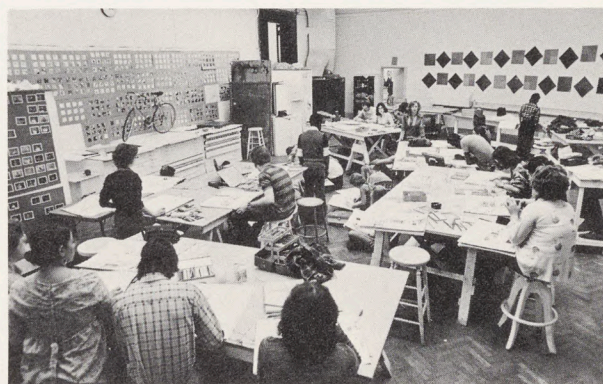


In 1972 the Board of Governors was dissolved and many Governors were absorbed in the enlarged Board of Trustees, presently comprising nine Life and twenty-six elected Trustees.

In January, 1974, the American Collection was chronologically installed allowing a unique opportunity to view the development of American art over 200 years. The installation was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency, in Washington, D.C. The Corcoran American Collection is comprised of almost 5,000 works of art, including paintings, sculpture, drawings, watercolors, prints and photographs. Reinstallation of the American Collection marked publication of the second volume of *The Catalogue of the Collection of American Paintings in The Corcoran Gallery of Art*. Volume 1 covers "Painters Born Before 1850" and was published in 1966. The second volume documents the work of painters born from 1850 to 1910 represented in the Gallery collection.

In the last decade many changes have taken place in the Gallery, particularly in the administrative structure and personnel, with varying influences on programs and policy. The Gallery became more involved in the avant-garde, with large and innovative exhibitions and increased events and activities, advancing the tradition and reputation of the Corcoran in the promotion of American art.

The Corcoran School of Art



The Corcoran School of Art was founded near the end of the last century. Establishment of an art school was first considered by the Board of Trustees in 1873. In 1875, the Gallery allowed students to draw and paint works in the collection, and the first rules governing the work of copyists was adopted. From December, 1877, free informal instruction in painting and drawing was given to students by a talented local painter, E. F. Andrews, who provided criticism and instruction. In 1878 Mr. Corcoran presented to the Board of Trustees a check in the amount of \$2,123.27 "for the specific purpose of aiding in the establishing of a school of design, in connection with the Gallery."

Provisions for education were frequently considered and discussed by Corcoran Trustees. In 1884, W. W. Corcoran wrote saying "how greatly such an education would conduce(sic) to the economical prosperity of our country as well as to the national reputation."

Oil painting class in the School, 1930-1931.

Entire student body of the School poses on the entrance steps, 1937-1938.



With continued increase in the flow of students, whose number came to interfere with the public's access to the works of art, it was decided in 1889 that it was necessary to provide alternate space, and a small building for students was erected behind the Gallery. The building was officially opened on January 6, 1890, with forty students and two instructors, giving formal birth to the Corcoran School of Art. The financial future of the School was provided for in the same year with the creation by the Board of Trustees of a separate School Fund utilizing an endowment of \$100,000 which Mr. Corcoran had bequeathed for that purpose on his death on February 24, 1888.

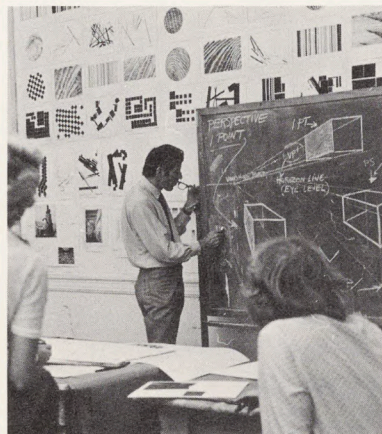
When the Gallery moved to 17th Street and New York Avenue, larger and better facilities were provided for the School. Beginning students would

draw from antiques in the basement and gradually move up to the larger daylight studios. In the early 1930s an attempt was made to introduce a more imaginative form of art teaching and in the 1950s design and drawing were emphasized as fundamental to painting and sculpture.

In 1970 the Corcoran School of Art implemented a structured full-time program giving students a sound basis for significant future accomplishments in art and design. The four-year professional program begins with a two-year Foundation course providing experience and insight into the fundamentals of art and design. The Dupont Center, in a building previously used by the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, provides workshop and studio facilities for senior students. Courses are offered in drawing, design, painting, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking,

Today's Diploma Program freshman class poses on the School entrance steps, 1975-1976.

Design and perspective class, 1975-1976.



Richard Lahey (Principal of the Corcoran School of Art) Richard Lahey, Edward Hopper and C. Powell in New York City on a Biennial Trip. 63.13



visual communication, history of photography, law and the creative person, art history, photography, and filmmaking. Beginning and advanced courses are offered in the day and evenings and courses for young people and adults are offered on Saturday and during the summer. Today enrollment has grown so that each semester nearly one thousand students take courses at the school, and of these over one hundred are in the full-time Diploma program. The Corcoran School of Art was admitted as a Division III member of the National Association of Schools of Art in April, 1971. In October, 1973 the school was admitted as a Division I candidacy status member of NASA. The Association accepts for membership only those schools "which consistently adhere to sound educational policies and practices."

The School of Art makes the Corcoran unique amongst the museums and galleries of the city. The School and Gallery offer much in art through education, exhibitions and events. Many exhibitions take place throughout the year: historical and contemporary, group and one-person shows, from different countries and in many media. Lectures, films, concerts, poetry readings and many other events further enrich the activities of the Corcoran, with the Gallery Education Department presenting tours, children's workshops, demonstrations, lectures and seminars. With exhibitions and events the emphasis is on American art, particularly the avant-garde and art of the Washington area. Through furthering the understanding and appreciation of American art, the Corcoran fulfills the intentions of the founder and continues to enrich our national heritage.

Frederick Remington Off the Range
bronze 05.7

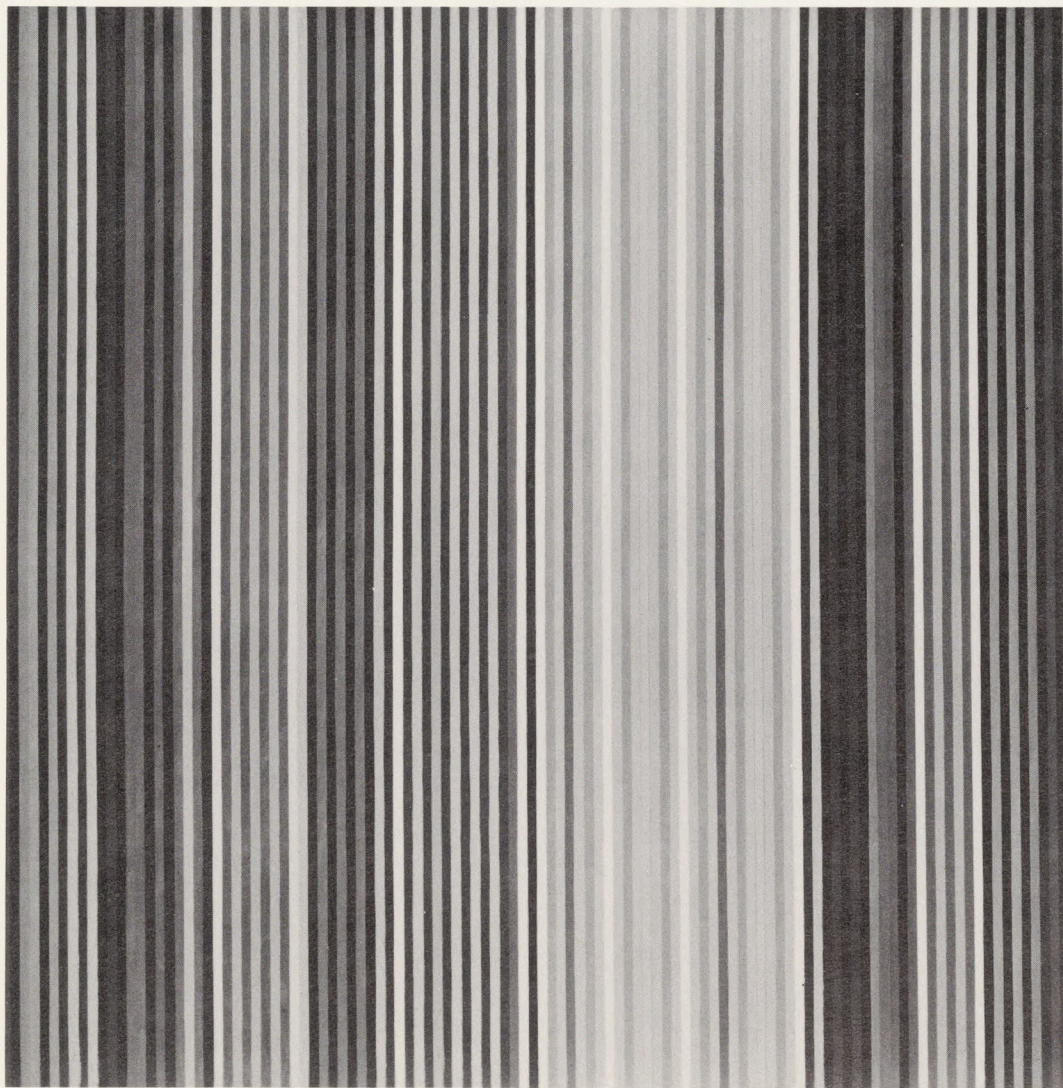


Chronology

William Wilson Corcoran

- | | | | |
|-------|---|-------|---|
| 1798 | Born in Georgetown, D.C. on December 27. | | |
| 1815 | Abandoned education to work in brothers' dry goods store. | 1856- | Corcoran Gallery of Art in the same style. |
| 1817 | With help of brothers established W. W. Corcoran & Co., a dry goods business. | 1860 | Active in the Washington Art Association. |
| 1823 | W. W. Corcoran & Co. failed in the Panic of 1823. | 1859 | Construction started on Corcoran Gallery of Art. Louise Morris Corcoran married George Eustis, a member of Congress. |
| 1825 | Arranged legal settlement with creditors of W. W. Corcoran & Co. | 1861- | Civil War. |
| 1835 | Married Louise Amory Morris with reluctant consent of her parents. | 1865 | |
| 1837 | Opened brokerage firm in Washington, D.C. Daughter Louise Morris Corcoran born. | 1861 | Hostility arose toward Corcoran because of his Southern sympathies. Federal Government took control of most of his property, including the incomplete art gallery building. |
| 1840 | Took George W. Riggs into partnership, renamed firm Corcoran & Riggs. | 1862 | Joined daughter in Paris after his son-in-law was captured in the Trent affair. |
| 1841 | Wife Louise Amory Morris Corcoran died. Corcoran & Riggs became financial agent of the U.S. Government. | 1863- | Journeyed to Italy with George Peabody. Made major purchases of contemporary Italian sculpture, including Guiseppe Croff's <i>The Veiled Nun</i> . |
| 1846 | Purchased first major work of art by European Old Master. | 1864 | Returned to Washington. |
| 1847 | Paid in full creditors of W. W. Corcoran & Co. | 1865 | Traveled to Paris to be with dying daughter. On her demise returned her remains to Washington for interment at Oak Hill Cemetery. |
| 1848 | Corcoran & Riggs took entire U.S. Government loan floated to finance Mexican War. W. W. Corcoran placed \$5,000,000 worth of the bonds on European markets, thus ensuring the success of Corcoran & Riggs and his personal fortune. | 1867- | |
| 1848- | Purchased Daniel Webster's house on Lafayette Square. Commissioned James Renwick to renovate the house and add wings to hold his art collection. | 1868 | Presented Deed of the Corcoran Gallery of Art to the first Board of Trustees. Made majority of his private art collection the nucleus around which the Gallery would develop. |
| 1852 | Hired Alexander J. Downing to landscape the gardens. | 1869 | Founded the Louise Home to aid gentlewomen impoverished by the Civil War. |
| 1849 | Established Oak Hill Cemetery. | 1869- | U.S. Government returned art building to Corcoran. Renwick completed the Corcoran Gallery of Art building. |
| 1849- | During tour of Europe purchased significant number of contemporary paintings. | 1872 | |
| 1850 | On return to America became interested in American art. Purchased Hiram Powers' <i>The Greek Slave</i> and Daniel Huntington's <i>Mercy's Dream</i> . Showed special interest in Hudson River School landscapes. | 1870 | Corcoran Gallery of Art Act of Incorporation passed by Congress. |
| 1851 | Opened personal art collection to public twice a week. | 1871 | Corcoran Gallery of Art building used for the first Ball of the Washington Monument Society. |
| 1852 | Assisted in founding Metropolitan Mechanics' Institute, an organization created to provide Washington artists with gallery space to show their works. | 1873 | Transferred works of art officially presented to the Gallery in 1869 from his private gallery to the Corcoran Gallery of Art. |
| 1854 | Retired from Corcoran & Riggs. | 1874 | Proposed formation of a school of design. |
| 1855 | Visited the Louvre with Jamts Renwick and was so impressed by French Renaissance architecture of the new wings he asked Renwick to construct | 1874- | Corcoran Gallery of Art opened to the public on January 19. |
| | | 1880 | Plans started for construction of an annex to the Gallery to house a national portrait gallery and an art school. |
| | | 1875 | Purchased the St. Memin collection of engravings of distinguished Americans. |

Gene Davis Black Popcorn, 1965 *acrylic on canvas*
67.7



- 1875- Recommended the Committee of the Works of Art
1888 purchase primarily portraits of famous Americans and thus create a national portrait gallery for the nation's capital.
1876- Vice-President of the Washington Monument
1880 Society.
1879 Purchased Presidential portraits by George Peter Alexander Healy.
1880 Annex construction plans dropped because of failure to obtain necessary property.
1878- Commissioned Moses Ezekiel to execute the scul-
1884 tural decoration of the facade of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.
1883 Had remains of John Howard Payne, author of "Home Sweet Home", brought from Tunisia and reinterred at Oak Hill Cemetery.
1888 William Wilson Corcoran died in Washington on February 24.

-
- 1890 Corcoran School of Art opened in a small building behind the Gallery with two instructors and forty students.
1893 Ground was broken on June 26 for the new Corcoran Gallery of Art building at 17th Street and New York Avenue. Architect Ernest Flagg.
1897 New Gallery building opened on February 22.
1907 First Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Painting.
1921 Senator William Andrews Clark donated \$100,000 to perpetuate the William A. Clark Prize Awards for the Biennial.
1925 Trustees of the Corcoran accepted the bequest of the William Andrews Clark collection of art.
1925- Clark Wing, funded by the Clark family, added to
1926 the Corcoran Gallery of Art.
1928 Inauguration of the William Andrews Clark Collection.
1929 \$400,000 endowment fund donated by the Clark family for upkeep of the Clark Collection.
1930 Reaffirmation by the Corcoran Trustees of the purpose of the Gallery to emphasize American art.
1947 Creation of the Association of the Corcoran Gallery of Art to provide a membership structure for the Gallery.

- 1952 Formation of the Women's Committee to advance the Gallery as an educational and cultural institution.
1961 Establishment of the Friends of the Corcoran to add significant works of art by contemporary artists to the Gallery collection.
1968 Washington Gallery of Modern Art merged with the Corcoran Gallery of Art.
1974 The American paintings and sculpture reinstalled.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art

Presidents of the Board of Trustees

James Mandeville Carlisle	1869-1877
James C. Hall	1877-1881
James C. Welling	1881-1894
Samuel H. Kauffman	1894-1906
Charles C. Glover	1906-1933
George E. Hamilton	1933-1946
Corcoran Thom	1946-1951
Charles C. Glover, Jr.	1951-1953
George E. Hamilton, Jr.	1953-1974
David Lloyd Kreeger	1974-

Directors

William MacLeod	1873-1889
F. Sinclair Barbarin	1889-1900
Frederick B. McGuire	1900-1915
C. Powell Minnigerode	1915-1947
Hermann Warner Williams, Jr.	1947-1968
James Harithas	1968-1969
Walter Hopps	1970-1972
Gene Baro	1972-1973
Roy Slade	1973-

Deans of the Corcoran School of Art

E. F. Andrews, Director	1887-1901
E. C. Messer, Director	1901-1918
Edmund C. Tarbell, Principal	1918-1926
Richard S. Meryman, Principal	1926-1935
Richard Lahey, Principal	1935-1963
Eugene Meyers, Dean	1966-1970
Roy Slade, Dean	1970-

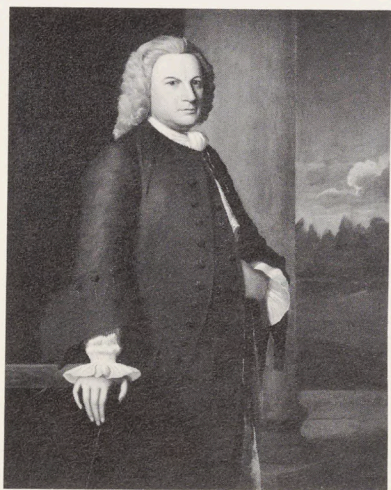


Unidentified artist. Eagle, 19th century wood 64.10

Richard Brooke A Pastoral Visit, 1881 oil on canvas 81.8

Robert Fekke Simon Pease oil on canvas 65.35

Albert Bierstadt The Last of the Buffalo, 1889 oil on canvas 09.12

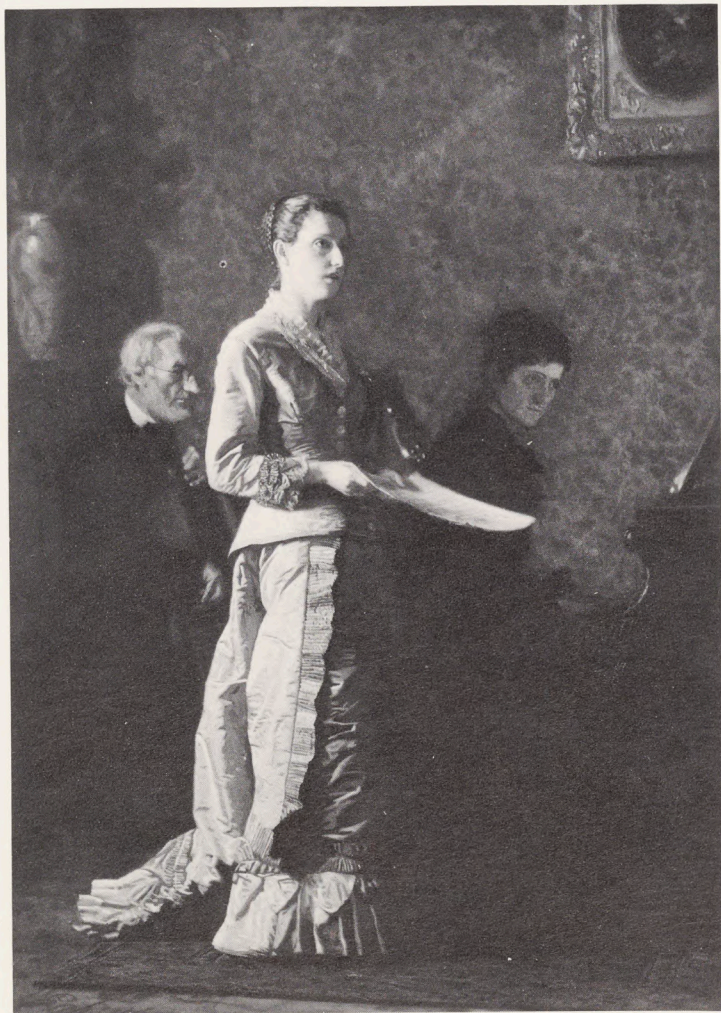


The American Collection

The American Collection is a chronologically comprehensive installation of painting and sculpture from colonial times to the contemporary, with the emphasis on art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The American Collection was installed in 1974 with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., a Federal agency.

In 1976, the installation was further improved with a new color scheme in the galleries, showcases of related material and explanatory texts. The twelve galleries present American art within the context of American history and heritage.



Thomas Eakins *The Pathetic Song*, 1881 oil on canvas
19.26

In 1975, two magazine articles were published on the American Collection in The Art Gallery Magazine, January, and The Magazine Antiques, November. The following excerpts are taken from the articles with full acknowledgment to The Art Gallery Magazine and Frank Getlein and The Magazine Antiques and Marchal Landgren. The article by Frank Getlein appeared in the previous year as a series of articles in the Washington Star.

The articles on the Corcoran Gallery of Art published in Art Gallery Magazine are available as a reprint in the Corcoran Shop, with catalogs and other publications of the Corcoran.

Elie Nadelman Fawn bronze 65.26



Corcoran's Collection IS America

The Corcoran Gallery of Art is Washington's oldest continuously active art museum and one of the three oldest major art museums in the nation—sharing its anniversary date with Boston and New York.

With the aid of a series of grants and matching grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the dedicated and quiet fund-raising by the Women's Committee, and with the professional talents of staff restorer, Robert Scott Wiles, the American collection has been newly installed in newly painted and somewhat rearranged galleries. The result is as instructive and pleasing a survey of American painting from mid-eighteenth century to mid-twentieth as can be found in the country.

There are few institutions that can rival the Corcoran in this field and none remotely in its class in this city.

It is all at the Corcoran. If you are an American, you have to go there to begin to understand yourself. But whatever you are, the Corcoran's collection is the best readily available summary of a new country, a new mind, a new vision—
Take it in—

The Art Gallery Magazine, January, 1975.

Frank Getlein is Critic-at-large for the Washington Star News. He was formerly Art Critic for the Milwaukee Journal and the New Republic and is the author of more than a dozen books including one on Chaim Gross.

Frederic Church Niagara, 1857 oil on canvas 76.15

Charles Frederic Ulrich In the Land of Promise:
The Castle Garden, 1884 oil on canvas 00.2

Edward Hopper Ground Swell, 1939 oil on canvas
43.6



Paul Wayland Bartlett The Bear Tamer bronze 44.8

John Singer Sargent The Oyster Gatherers of Cancale, 1878 oil on canvas 17.2

Winslow Homer The Hudson River — Logging, 1897 watercolor 03.4



American paintings at the Corcoran Gallery of Art Washington, D.C.

The Corcoran Gallery moved into its present home at Seventeenth Street and New York Avenue, N.W., in 1897. Designed by Ernest Flag, the museum's current white-marble structure is considered by architects to be the finest and the best-articulated building in the Beaux-Arts tradition in Washington. In that city, where most public institutions, including its many museums, owe their existence to Federal support, the Corcoran has to this day retained its independent status, and draws its support from the community at large.

Over its one-hundred-year history the gallery has never lost sight of the dual role assigned to it by its founder. Emphasizing American art, both in its exhibitions and its acquisitions, it has managed to maintain a balance between preservation of the historical past and engagement in the contemporary scene.

Under the present director, Roy Slade, the dual role of the Corcoran has been publicly reasserted. Twelve galleries have been refurbished with the aid of the National Endowment for the Arts and set aside for a permanent installation of the collection of American paintings, while at the same time sufficiently ample space has been reserved for the work of living artists.

The Corcoran collection of American art is without doubt the most broadly comprehensive, if not necessarily the largest, in existence. At this writing, it includes 781 paintings, 224 sculptures, 160 watercolors, 635 drawings, 32 pastels, and 2616 prints.



Mary Cassatt Susan on a Balcony with a Dog, ca. 1880
oil on canvas 09.8

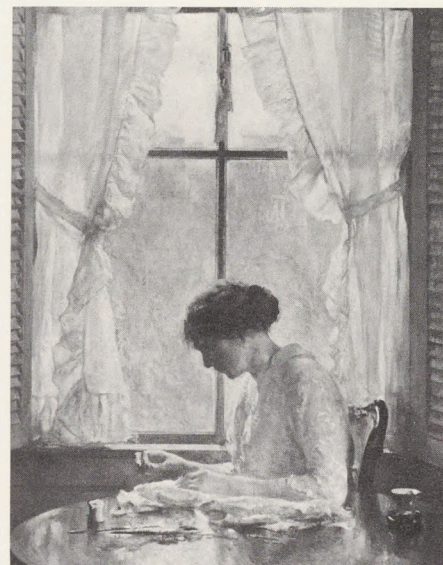
George Wesley Bellows Forty-two Kids, 1907
oil on canvas 31.12

Joseph Rodefer De Camp The Seamstress, 1916
oil on canvas 16.4



In its totality, it represents the tastes of many generations of Americans and the many influences that have affected the course of American art.

As presently reinstalled, about one-quarter of the American painting collection is on display, approximately two hundred canvases. Limited to works by artists born before 1910—those included in the two published volumes of the catalogue—the selection reflects the present state of scholarship in American art. Almost all the holdings by painters of the colonial period and the early years of the republic are included, testifying to the amount of study that has been given to these periods. But as the installation, which is more or less chronological, moves forward



in time, the selection tends progressively to reflect current interests in the American past. The Hudson River school, from Thomas Cole to Frederic Edwin Church, is well represented. The triumvirate of the so-called native American school—Winslow Homer, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Thomas Eakins—is juxtaposed to the trio of their expatriate contemporaries: Mary Cassatt, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, and John Singer Sargent. The influence of the French impressionists on the native idiom is emphasized in the paintings of *The Ten*, and is evident in the work of the painters of modern life, known as the Ashcan School and *The Eight*. The selection ends with the beginnings of modern art in America as seen in the influence of the School of

Frank W. Benson Still Life, 1925 oil on canvas
26.802

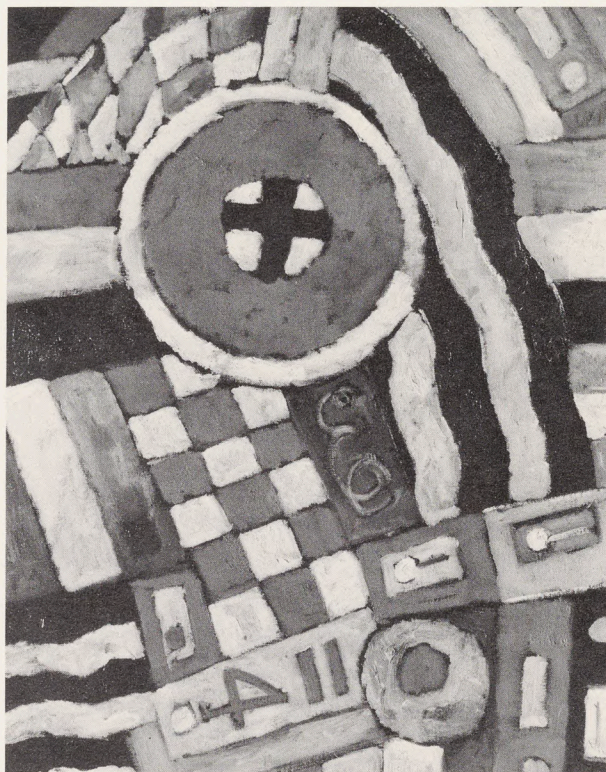
Marsden Hartley Berlin Abstraction, 1914-15
oil on canvas 67.3



Paris on American art. Thus the selection, in the best of museum traditions, offers the visitor a concentrated view of the history of American art as modern scholarship has revealed it. The collection, of course, is more comprehensive than indicated by the selection currently displayed. If the hopes of the Corcoran are realized, special exhibitions of other works in the collection will be mounted from time to time as scholarship discloses their significance.

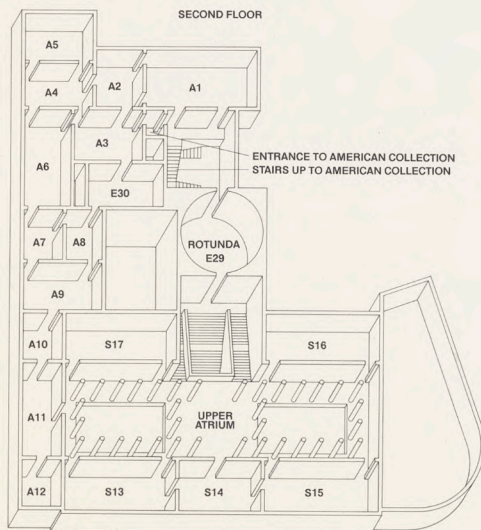
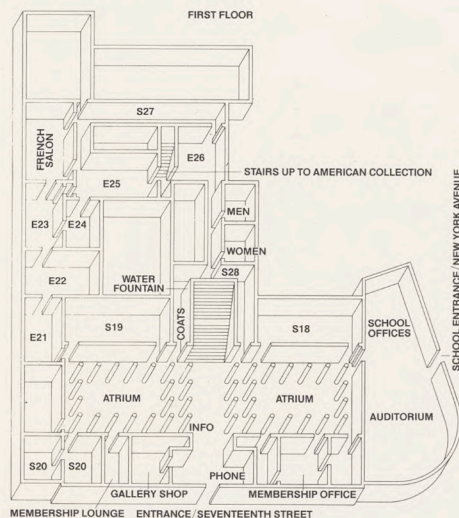
The Magazine Antiques, November, 1975.

Marchal Landgren is the retired director of the University of Maryland Art Gallery and serves as a consultant to the Gallery. He is a renowned scholar and writer on the history of American art.



Plan of the first floor, Corcoran Gallery of Art

Plan of the second floor, Corcoran Gallery of Art, showing the installation of the American Collection, A1 through A12.



Acknowledgments

This publication and the Bicentennial exhibitions are a tribute to the founder and to all those involved for over one hundred years in the Corcoran. The support of Trustees, donors, volunteers, members and the public, with the professional commitment of the staff, faculty and artists have all contributed to the progress and reputation of the gallery and school.

Essays

William Wilson Corcoran

The concept and instigation of the publication honoring William Wilson Corcoran was that of the Director. To realize the concept many persons were involved. The research for the essay and exhibition on W. W. Corcoran was undertaken by Davira Spiro Taragin who, as a graduate student at George Washington University, wrote her thesis on Mr. Corcoran and, as part of her graduate study program, was an intern for two semesters at the Corcoran Gallery. Editorial direction was provided for the essay and supplementary material by the Director; Terry Kneebone, Special Assistant to the Director; and Mrs. Ralph E. Phillips, Curator of Collections and Research.

Numerous individuals have willingly shared material for the research with Mrs. Taragin: Allan Bassing, Renwick Gallery; Abigail Booth, Bicentennial Inventory for American Paintings; David Brown, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University; Jay Cantor, Old Sturbridge Village; Henry T. Cohen, Loyola University of Chicago; Dr. Andrew J. Cosentino, Franklin & Marshall College; George B. Davis, Virginia Military Institute; Richard Finnegan, Knoedlers' & Co.; Perry Fisher, Columbia Historical Society; Linda Galbraith, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Donald T. Gibbs, Redwood Library and Athenaeum; Mrs. Stuart B. Gibson, Valentine Museum; James Goode, Smithsonian Institution; James Hobbins, Joseph Henry Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives; Thomas S. Jackson; Joseph E. Jeffs, Library, Georgetown University; John Melville Jennings, Virginia Historical Society; George Kackley; Dean Kayser, George Washington University; Linda O. King, Louisiana State Museum; Donald C. Kline, Dimock Gallery, George Washington University; Betty R. Kondayan, Cyrus Hall McCormick Library, Washington and Lee University; Rupert Latture, Washington and Lee University; Mary Ann Leake, Library, University of Virginia; Paul Leatham, Sergeant Major, United States Soldiers' Home; Donald McClelland, National Collection of Fine Arts;

William Glackens "I Went Down That There Slide
Faster Than the Empire State Express" charcoal
drawing 43.16

John Sloan Sunday — Girls Drying Their Hair
lithograph 51.33



Christine Meadows, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association; David Meschutt, Lee Chapel, Washington and Lee University; Ellen Nyette, Renwick Gallery, National Collection of Fine Arts; Mrs. Edwin Parker, Sr.; William C. Pollard, the College of William and Mary in Virginia; Patricia Potter-Lauretti, Library, University of Virginia; Lilian Randall, Walters Art Gallery; Mary Southall, Virginia Historical Society; Richard Tetlie; Donald Tillson; H. Stuart Treviranus; Robert Truax, Columbia Historical Society; Franz Von Recum; William T. Welling; Mathilda Williams, George Peabody Room, Peabody Library Association, Georgetown Public Library.

Recognition must also be accorded to the staff of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress for their readiness to help uncover new materials relating to William Wilson Corcoran. The many descendants of William Wilson Corcoran must also be commended for their willingness to help locate works of art owned by Corcoran. We would especially like to thank Dr. and Mrs. Edward Childs, Mr. and Mrs. David E. Finley, Mrs. Edward Murray, and Mr. Corcoran Thom, Jr.

The Corcoran

The history of the gallery and school initially compiled by Niles Bond, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, has been edited with the assistance of Terry Kneebone, Special Assistant to the Director on temporary assignment from the United States Information Agency.

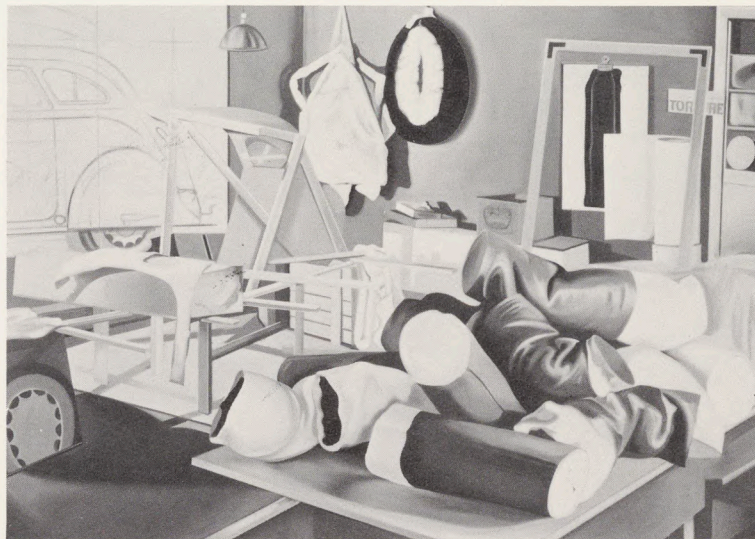
The assistance of Muriel Kovaly, Executive Secretary; Francis Harper, Administrative Assistant and Addice Thomas, Curatorial Assistant, was invaluable in the preparation of the text.

Exhibitions

The Bicentennial exhibitions on W. W. Corcoran and the American Collection were the responsibility of the Director and his staff: Davira Spiro Taragin organized the exhibition on W. W. Corcoran with the help of the Curatorial staff; Dean Thomas and Bill Christenberry the exhibition on the Corcoran School of Art; Jane Livingston, Chief Curator, the exhibition

Hans Hofmann Golden Blaze, 1958 oil on canvas
68.37 Gift of the Friends of the Corcoran and
Mr. Maxwell Oxman

Lowell Nesbitt Claes Oldenburg's Studio, 1967
oil on canvas 68.8 Gift of the artist



of Recent Acquisitions. Susan Grady, Registrar; Shelby Cave, Assistant Registrar; Connie Vaughan, Curatorial Intern; Tony Blazys, Chief Preparator, and his staff; Paul Kennedy, Photographer; and Einar Gomo, Building Superintendent have all contributed greatly to coordinating the installation of the several exhibits.

Davira Spiro Taragin provided the research and material for the W. W. Corcoran exhibition and many loans were generously obtained from individuals and institutions including the Columbia Historical Society; Dimock Gallery, George Washington University; Mr. and Mrs. David E. Finley; the Library of Congress; the Louise Home; the Mount Vernon Ladies Association; Mrs. Edward E. Murray; the National Archives; the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Mrs. Edwin P. Parker, Sr.; the Peabody Library Association of Georgetown; the Redwood Library and Atheneum; Renwick Gallery, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution; Riggs National Bank; the Smithsonian Institution; Mr. Corcoran Thom, Jr.; Mr. Robert Truax; Washington and Lee University; Mr. William Wellings.

The American Genius

The exhibition celebrating the founder, William Wilson Corcoran, his collection, the school, Washington art, recent acquisitions and the re-installation of the American Collection is made possible through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington D.C., a Federal agency.

The Washington Room

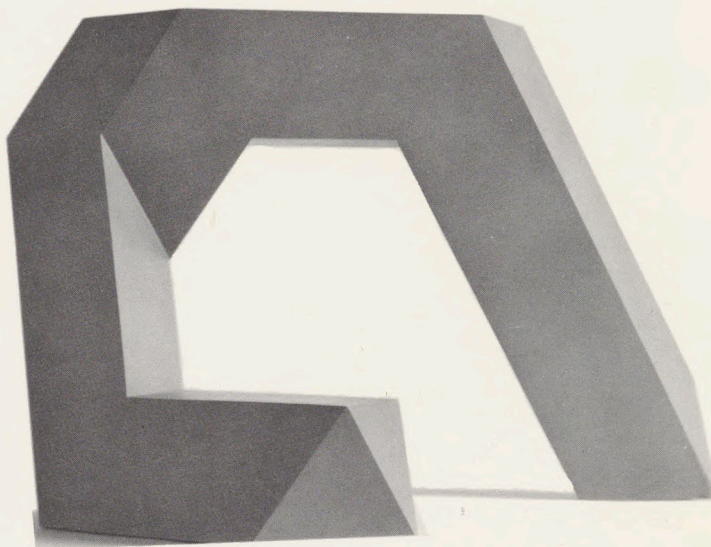
A changing presentation of contemporary Washington art is made possible through grants from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington D.C., a Federal agency.

The American Collection

The American Collection has been enlarged and developed over the past one hundred years, with many new acquisitions having been made, both of historical and contemporary art. Dr.

Sam Gilliam Blue Twirl, 1971 *acrylic on canvas*
1972.19 *Gift of the Women's Committee*

Tony Smith Cigarette, 1967 *steel, vapor blasted*
68.24



Hermann Warner Williams, Jr., Director for twenty one years (1947-1968), made an invaluable contribution to the American Collection and through his advice and guidance many acquisitions were made.

Mrs. Ralph E. Phillips, Curator of Collections and Research for over fifteen years, has contributed much through her knowledge and expertise to the collections, particularly through the publication of the two volumes on the American paintings in the Corcoran collection.

Recent acquisitions continue to strengthen the collection and the Women's Committee and Friends of the Corcoran have been most generous.

Particular thanks must go to Mrs. Gerald A. Richardson whose generous contribution in memory of her husband made possible the acquisition of *Brown Stretched* by Kenneth Noland. This painting and other new acquisitions exhibited for the first time represent a continuation of the founder's interest in living American artists.

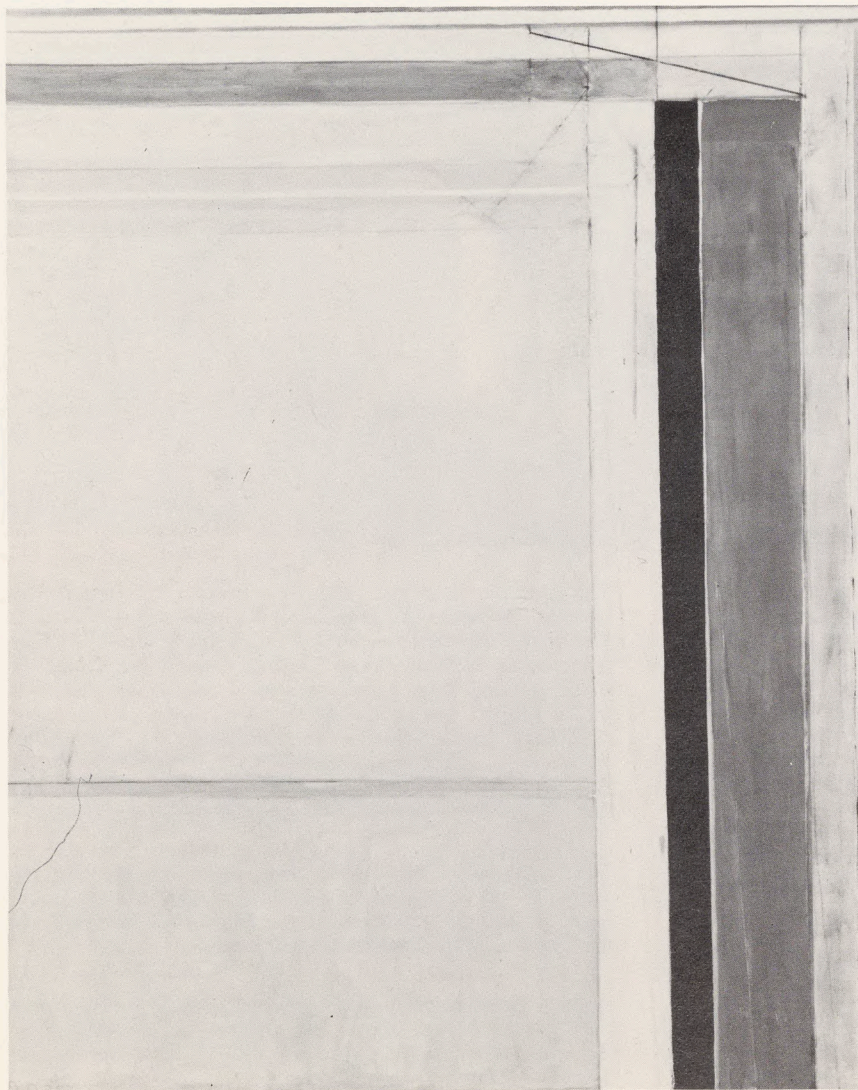
The American Collection has been enriched by the addition of material that relates the paintings and sculpture to the events of history and the art of the nation. Mrs. Ralph E. Phillips; Linda C. Simmons, Assistant Curator; Donna Barnard Ari, Curator of Education; and Terry Kneebone worked toward the realization of this project. Robert Scott Wiles, Conservator, has continued to work on the restoration of the Collection. A special note of recognition is due Hugh N. Jacobsen, Trustee, and Dr. Lillian B. Miller, Historian of American Culture, the National Portrait Gallery, for advice and assistance given to this reinstatement.

The President and Board of Trustees, particularly the Committee on Works of Art, have given their support and encouragement, as have the Chairman of the Women's Committee and the President of the Friends of the Corcoran.

Finally, thanks again must go to everyone who has supported the Corcoran Gallery of Art over the past one hundred years, and most of all, for his vision in founding the Gallery and School, to William Wilson Corcoran.

Diebenkorn, Noland and Frankenthaler paintings are recent acquisitions, 1975.

*Richard Diebenkorn Ocean Park #83, 1975
oil on canvas 75.30 Museum Purchase with funds
from the National Endowment for the Arts, the W. A.
Clark Fund and the donation of Margaret Hitchcock.*



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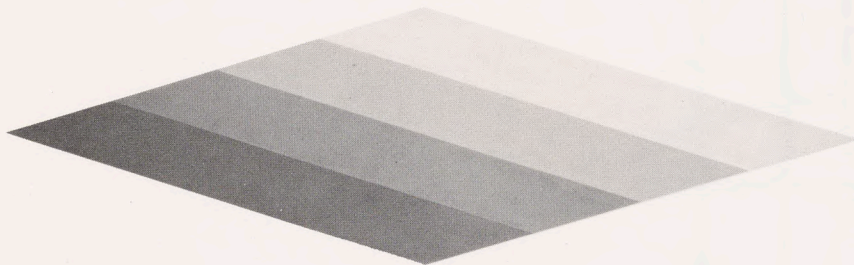
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Helen Frankenthaler Hurricane Flag, 1969 acrylic on canvas 75.31 Gift of the Women's Committee of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Kenneth Noland Brown Stretched, 1966 acrylic on canvas 75.38 Gift of Mrs. Gerald A. Richardson in memory of Mr. Gerald A. Richardson.



Gene Davis and crew at work painting "Magic Circle" for the 34th Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, 1975.

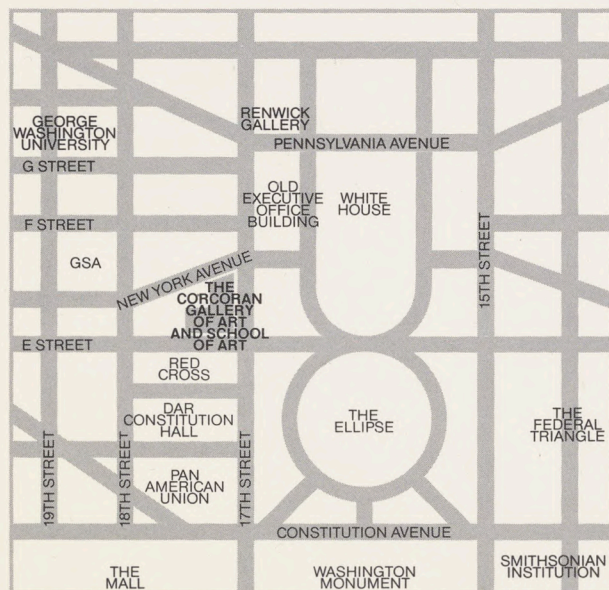
Jurying of works submitted for the 19th Area Exhibition, 1974.

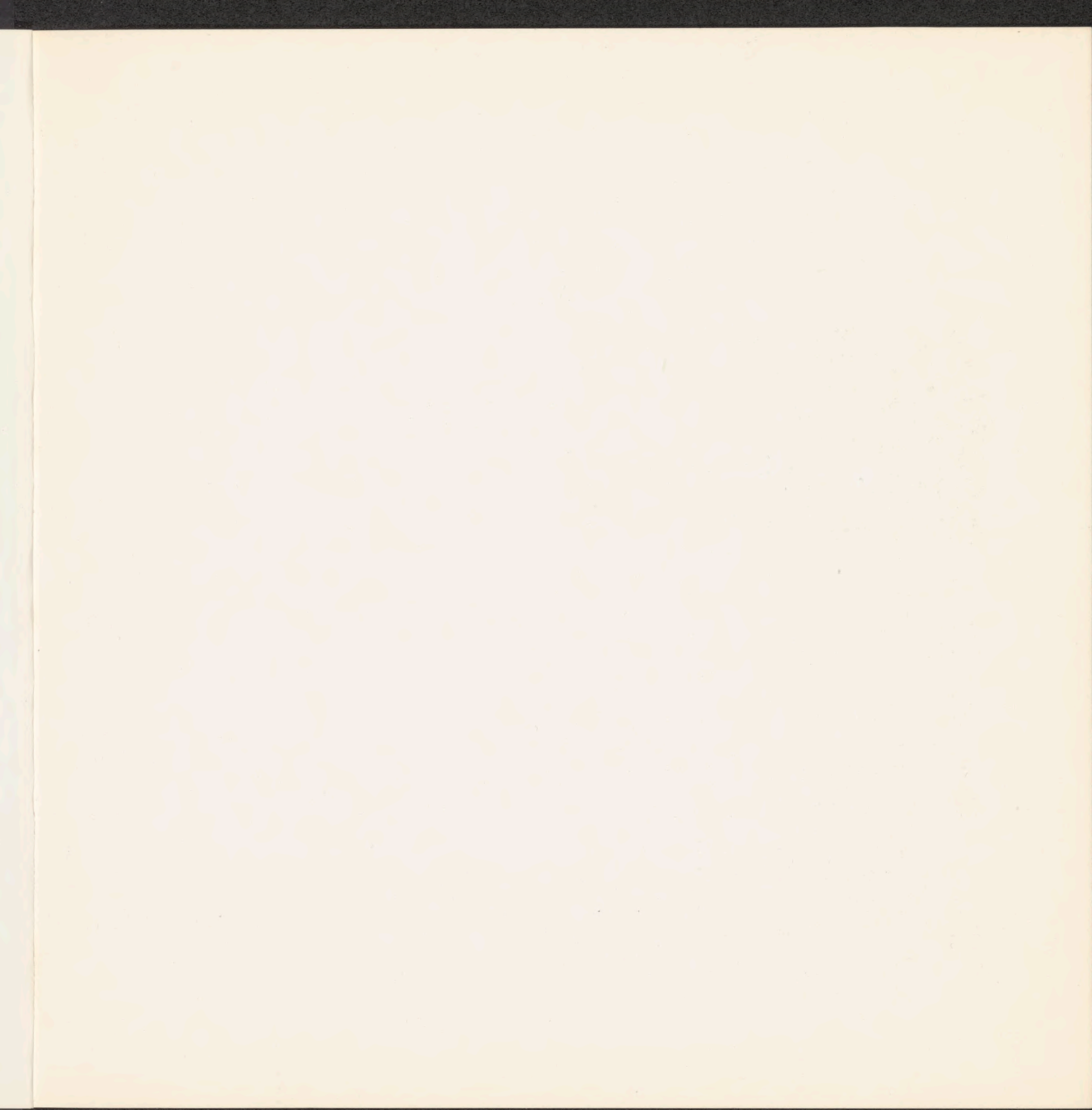


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